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# THE LIFE OF MAHOMET





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By  
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## PREFACE

MAHOMET'S existence is no longer doubted by anyone. The most pedantic critic does not dream of denying it, although we accept the traditional story of the Arab Prophet to-day with many reservations. Certainly, hypercriticism sometimes oversteps itself (in several different ways, unfortunately), but at the present time we surely cannot write a life of Mahomet in the same words and from the same view-point as the last biographies published in France some fifty years ago, like Washington Irving's work, for instance.

In writing this book, I wanted to present a true and vivid account drawn from original Arab sources, taking into consideration everything recently acquired through the researches of specialists. I wanted to draw as accurate a portrait of Mahomet as possible, as he appears to me after watching him live again in the hearts of his adherents and in the tales from books.

If every human life is instructive, if each destiny is enlightening, is it not particularly touching and deeply satisfying to meet one of the men whose message gave life to a portion of humanity?

The earliest sources of Mahomet's life are the *Koran*, the *Sunna* (tradition or the *hadiths*) and the *Sira* (first biographies). It is chiefly founded on the *Koran*, the most valid source although the most restricted. The *hadiths* of the traditionalists (Bokhari,

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above all) who endeavoured to collect the smallest word or recall the least action of the Prophet are sometimes accusatory or suspicious ; for, while they seriously criticized the *isnads* (or chain of evidence) from the outside they did not judge it thoroughly from within. The different schools came to blows over the *hadiths*, a great number of which are obviously forged. On the other hand the schools are none too scrupulous and credit the master with almost any agreeable idea or wise statement. They have also made borrowings from the Scriptures, putting into Mahomet's mouth many Biblical or evangelical passages, or the refutation of certain Christian doctrines. Finally, they have attributed to him miracles which were clearly apocryphal since he declared himself unable to perform them.

Though possible, it is not always easy to plough through the enormous mass of *hadiths*, once we have admitted the grounds for falsification. Leaving out absurd, suspicious or plagiarized facts, there remain an appreciable number of *hadiths* which, when compared to other sources such as records of the times, appear at least likely or very probable, even if not mathematically certain ; history is rarely certain except in its outlines. "It is contrary to all sane methods," said Snouck Hurgronje, "to reject a given tradition when we cannot trace the origin that gave birth to it and when there is no historic reason to discredit it."

As for the *Sira* or the first biographies of Mahomet by Ibn Hisham (following Ibn Is'haq), by Waqidi, by Ibn Sa'd ; then by Halabi, Abulfida, Tabari, Mas'udi, etc., they share the weaknesses of the *hadiths* which they endeavoured, often with great difficulty, to put into logical and chronological order ; but in spite of everything, we must realize that they

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are objective and do not conceal to too great an extent the faults and indiscretions of the Prophet. This is especially true of the first ones. The further we go, on the contrary, the more capricious and conventional the biographies of Mahomet become. It is true that certain thinkers, like Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century, had original ideas. In our time, the modernists have reconstructed to a certain extent the Mahometan-Mussulman question, and have presented Mahomet somewhat insipidly and idealistically to suit the taste of the present day,<sup>1</sup> also speaking of Jesus in a flippant manner, which Mahomet condemned.

From the European angle prejudices have for long opposed a truly scientific study of the origins of Islam (see Part I, Chapter IX), although in the nineteenth century a serious effort was made by the following : Caussin de Perceval, Muir, Weil, Margoliouth, Nöldeke, Sprenger, Snouck Hurgronje, Dozy. Somewhat more recently the works of Caetani, Lammens, Massignon Montet, Casanova, Bell, Huart, Houdas, Marçais, Arnold, Grimme, Goldziher, Gaudefroy-Demombynes, etc., have again brought up the question. Sometimes, unfortunately, certain of these specialists fell into the error of excessive radicalism.

I have tried, for my part, to steer a proper course between the traditionalist out of date version (represented to-day by MM. Dinet and Sliman ben Ibrahim) and the hypercritical version of certain modern Orientalists. Mostly I have drawn from the two extremes, the primitive sources and the modern critics. The results of these last are unfortunately still incomplete, contradictory and negative as well

<sup>1</sup> Mohammed 'Abdu in Egypt and his disciples ; Syed Ameer 'Ali and the *Islamic Review* in India.

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(a negative account is worthless and my intention was not to pen a succession of dissertations). While one Orientalist declares that Mahomet was superior to all his contemporaries and at least different from them, another decides that he resembled them in every way. The one makes him die of apoplexy caused by an excessive appetite ; the other of a delirious fever due to too lengthy abstinence. In hunting the key to this amazing character, " less than a god, more than a man, a Prophet," as Lamartine said, the theory of epilepsy was brought up ; and in Charcot's time, Sprenger's diagnosis was bad hysteria, now out of date since Babinski. But M. Massignon declares Mahomet to have been well-balanced. They had tried to reconstruct chronologically the Suras of the Koran, but none of the proposed lists coincides with any other. The *hanifs* were considered authentic thirty years ago, then for some time they were discredited but were countenanced again after the publication of Omayya's verses ; now these are once more the object of learned suspicion. It is probable that they did really exist and that their " Abrahamism " was added later, etc. . . .

Father Lammens, one of the most erudite of recent specialists, is unfortunately one of the most partial also. His brilliant and ingenious books are spoiled by his antipathy for Islam and its Prophet. Employing in this history hypercritical measures which others have used against Christianity, the learned Jesuit says, for example, that when tradition agreed with the Koran, tradition copied the Koran. How make history if two concording witnesses feel they must disagree instead of standing by each other ? It is very true that the *hadiths* were occasionally forged to explain certain Koranic passages or to make use of

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some true detail more or less arbitrarily ; the *hadiths* also tended to substantialise these facts and accept them to the letter. But frequently what they recount may be true.

They say, for instance, that if the *hadiths* tell us Mahomet had a liking for honey, it is because the Koran mentions the curative value of this food. We might just as well say that because Mahomet liked honey and found it healthy he recommended it, or moreover that honey in itself is healthy and recommendable. Let us suppose this was exact (and no logical, ontological or historical impossibility prevents us from supposing that Mahomet liked honey), for, otherwise, how was the retailer of the *hadiths* able to glean it and relate it without incurring the suspicion of the modern scholar ? Be this as it may, Father Lammens's works are a precious mine from which I have often drawn ; especially his "Berceau de l'Islam" and his monograph on Mecca, for Chapters II and III, and I am desirous to state my debt.

I have deliberately, however, cast out everything obviously false, such as miracles invented two centuries after the death of the person to whom they were attributed, and many other improbable things. Certain doubtful although possible facts have been accepted because of their importance, but then I have indicated their more or less certain or legendary character by careful distinctions. Strange and picturesque as this Life may appear, it is in no wise a romantic history. All the sayings of the characters are scrupulously rendered from the sources. The texts from the Koran are in italics.

I have written *Mahomet* and not *Mohammad*. In twenty years, perhaps, I shall have given up this

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transcription which dates from the eighteenth century and also savours of it. But it seemed that a “Life of Abulqasim Mohammad ben ‘Abdallah ben ‘Abdelmottalib el Hashimi” would cause still more confusion to-day.

We must note here that the original name of the Prophet was really Qotham, or Zobath, a name either changed soon after his birth or at the time of his mission into that of Mohammad, “the glorified”, a prophetic title more than a first name, properly speaking. For a long time he was called Abulqasim, the father of Qasim.

**PART I**

**MECCA**



## CHAPTER I

### SELMAN THE PERSIAN

*This age is an age of prophets.*

ON Friday, the 16th day of the month of Rabi' (July 2nd), 622, Selman the slave was working at the top of a palm-tree in the Oasis of Yathrib. His master, a Jew of that town, and proprietor of the palm-grove, was below. The temperature was still bearable before the torrid noon heat and Selman was making use of this early freshness. Unexpectedly a cousin of the Jew arrived, in a state of rage.

"May God curse the children of Qayla!" he cried, referring to the Yathrib Arabs and their common grandmother.

"What is the matter now?" said the Jew.

"May God destroy all the Banu Qayla! I do not know what has come over them now, but here they are at this very moment gathered around a man from Mecca who calls himself a Prophet."

"When I heard that word," Selman said, "I began to tremble; I shook so violently that I was afraid of falling out of the tree on to my master's head." Thereupon he came down from the tree and approached the newcomer.

"Tell me what you are saying?" he said.

But instead, he received a well-directed slap in the face.

"Why are you meddling?" said his master, after hitting him. "Mind your own business and go on with your work. What has this to do with you?"

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“Nothing, nothing,” stammered the poor slave.  
“I only wanted to hear the details of what he was  
saying.”

The people of Yathrib had awaited the coming of Mahomet for some time. They knew that with his own people, the Emigrants (*Mohajirūn*), he had fled from Mecca to seek protection amongst the *Ansar*, his “aids” or his “supporters”, and faithful inhabitants of Yathrib. Later this town became the “Prophet’s city” (*Madinat en Nabi*). Each morning a certain number of the townspeople went to await him in one of the two fields of black, volcanic stones encircling the city, and remained there until the intense heat drove them back.

At last Mahomet arrived with his faithful companion, Abu Bakr. The two had set out alone, hiding in a cave near Mecca for three days and nights and then had crossed the desert, escaping all pursuers. Accompanied by an enthusiastic crowd, the Prophet now approached Yathrib mounted on his camel, El Qoswa, with Abu Bakr by his side. Boraïda, the Sheikh of a neighbouring tribe, attached his own turban to the end of a lance—he did not want Mahomet to enter the town without a banner—and walked in front. Over the Prophet’s head they held a sort of parasol of palm branches and the *Ansar* went on foot brandishing their sabres and lances, announcing the coming of Mahomet and promising to defend him against all his enemies. Seventy horsemen of the Boraïda tribe made up his escort of honour.

Mahomet was in the full vigour of his manhood, robust, of medium height, strongly built, with broad chest and massive head ; his hands and feet, although large, were fine and sensitive, his skin tanned, his

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cheeks clear without red in them, his hair neither very curly nor altogether straight. Although the employment of black slaves had already corrupted the purity of the Arab race in the towns, this mixture seemed scarcely perceptible in Mahomet.

His hair floated freely to below his ears and his moustaches were clipped, a fashion he had adopted in order to distinguish himself from the idolaters, who wore their hair parted in the centre, and to associate himself with the *People of the Book*, both Jew and Christian. His square face with its decided aquiline nose, wide mouth, and eyebrows divided by a blue vein which sometimes swelled with anger, was framed by a tufted and very black beard overhanging his lower lip. From under a turban his countenance beamed with a majestic radiance at the same time impressive and gentle. People felt that this inspired man was born to command and they obeyed him blindly. The *Ansar* had found their master.

They admired everything about him—his loftiness and his affability, his almost irresistible power, and even his misfortunes which brought him to them for shelter. These generous and indolent people clung to him all the more because he needed their protection and accepted beforehand this exile's laws ; for was he not their chief as well as their guest ?

The Prophet stopped for a moment on the outskirts of the town, dismounted and, turning towards the north in the direction of Jerusalem, offered up a prayer with all the crowd ; although the people there begged him to stay, he remounted and rode into the centre of Yathrib.

To prevent his camel from getting into mischief, Mahomet loosed its reins and allowed it to wander as it liked. It passed through several narrow streets,

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crossed some open spaces swarming with excited crowds, and ended by kneeling on the spot where soon afterwards the Mosque was erected. Mahomet dismounted and came forward, walking quickly with firm and vigorous steps, his body bent slightly forward as if climbing a mountain. His escort scattered the crowd to make room for him but, nevertheless, he bowed amiably to everyone, including even the little children. When he smiled, he showed very white teeth set wide apart. Finally he went into the house of a man named Abu Ayyub to wait until they built rooms for himself and his wives round about the House of Prayer.

A new State, built solely upon religion, was about to be born in Arabia.

There are men who seek for truth. In this confused and dull world where nothing beautiful and good can exist which is not mixed with ugliness and evil somehow, where free-minded and upright people seem exiles, there are still a few beings who cannot live without truth. They are wounded painfully by the display of injustice and prejudice, and they suffer from a particular infirmity : the longing for an unbiassed mind and a clear understanding.

Selman the Persian<sup>1</sup> searched for truth with all his soul. He was born in Fars, was the son of a village preacher, they say—but Allah is the most knowing!—and trained in the Magian religion. He tended the sacred fire, never neglecting it or allowing it to die out. This holy flame, the symbol of Ormuzd, conqueror of the Shades of Ahriman, must blaze ceaselessly towards the Iranian skies to bear witness day and night to the battle of life and light threatened

<sup>1</sup> Or more exactly, *el Farisi*, of Fars.

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by the obscure forces which otherwise might lead them ultimately to death.

The pious youth venerated the gods, purified himself regularly with cows' urine, and learned the sayings of the aged Zoroaster. Yet at times he felt something lacking ; his soul was troubled.

Selman was the friend of a royal prince—again they say—with whom he hunted occasionally. One day when they were riding in the desert with their greyhounds and falcons they came upon an old man seated before a tent of camels' skins, reading a book with the tears flowing from his eyes.

"What is it ?" they asked from their saddles. The old man lifted up his streaming eyes and looked at them for some time in silence ; then, no doubt finding sympathy in their curiosity, he said :

"Those desiring knowledge should not sit there like you. If you would know what is in this book get down from your saddles and come hither." The hunters dismounted and the stranger continued :

"This is God's book, written by his command, which orders you to obey and worship Him alone. In it is said : 'Neither shalt thou commit adultery ; neither shalt thou steal ; neither shalt thou covet anything that is thy neighbour's.' "

This book was the Gospel and the old man a Nestorian Christian. It was through this channel, actually, that Christianity was introduced into Persia. It encircled pagan Arabia, with Christians from Yemen and Nejran in the South ; those from Abyssinia and Egypt in the West ; in the North-west with the Byzantines (the *Rum*) and their Arabian vassals, the Ghassanides ; and in the North-east with the Christian Arabs from Hira, where reigned a petty king of the Lakhmide dynasty, a vassal of the mighty

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Persian Emperor. But then, in the Orient, Christianity had greatly degenerated and was divided in the extreme by dogmatic disputes in which abstract formulas eventually replaced living faith.

It was introduced into Mesopotamia and Persia in the fifth and sixth centuries in Nestorian form, while Syria was rather Monophysite. There were churches at Nisibis, Kashkar, Jundeshapur and Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the winter capital of the kings of Sassanide Persia. The Christians with their churches and monks were more or less tolerated on condition that they were discreet and did not excite the jealousy of the preachers of the Magian religion.

Selman was greatly struck at meeting the old man with the book. Could it be that a god superior to all others gods had deigned to enter into direct communication with men? Had he actually before his eyes the authentic traces of this wonderful revelation written in symbols on a roll of parchment? This idea struck him, and he was moved by the beauty of a morality which looked upon the love of this heretofore inaccessible god as all-important, and that of mankind as well.

He got to know other Christians, went to hear them sing hymns and pray in their church. Their prayers pleased him and he felt a great longing to take part in them. "This religion is worth more than ours," he said. On one occasion he stayed in the church until the evening, forgetting to run on an errand for his father, to whom he confided his trouble.

"There's nothing good about this religion," said his father; "ours is descended from our forefathers and is worth more than any other."

But as the young man was unconvinced his father saw to it that he did not see his new friends again;

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and they say that at the same time the king noticed similar tendencies in the prince, Selman's companion. For, in the midst of the feast, had he not been seized with an extraordinary idea and refused to eat the flesh of the victims offered up on the altars ? The king was furious and exiled the monk and his associates.

Selman now had but one idea : to follow the outcasts. Certainly he had read in their book that, if need be, a man might leave his father and mother to search for the truth. He had heard it said that this religion, so attractive to him, was to be found flourishing in Syria, so, deciding to go there, he profited by a caravan of whose existence he was informed by the remaining Christians of the district. Once in Damascus, Selman looked for the most learned doctor to instruct him. The bishop was pointed out.

“ I am a man with a leaning towards your religion,” Selman said to him. “ I would like to live near you, learn and pray with you, and work in your church.”

The bishop welcomed Selman, who was soon cruelly disillusioned. His master was grasping and deceitful. He asked the people to give alms and instead of dividing them amongst the poor he hoarded the money for himself in a secret place.

When this bishop died they prepared a sumptuous funeral for him, but the young Persian's conscience was so shocked by such injustice that he could not refrain from telling them about the dead man's dishonesty. The angry people stoned the corpse instead.

Selman attached himself to a new bishop and this time he was satisfied. He had never before met a man so detached from the world or who prayed so perfectly. He loved the bishop and remained with him for a long time. In his desire to emulate him he

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practised so many mortifications that one day his master said to him :

“ Be more merciful to yourself and lighten the burden you have imposed. Incautious mortifications are sometimes more dangerous than useful.”

“ Your words have sunk into my heart,” said Selman, “ but tell me which *in itself* is better : that which I have been doing until now or that which you tell me to do ? ”

“ Without a doubt, what you have been doing.”

“ Then, let me continue.”

On the whole, Selman was a man who aimed at perfection.

He made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and shortly after this his master fell seriously ill. Seeing him about to die, Selman said :

“ I have loved you the most amongst men. Now that death is about to separate us tell me of some devout and enlightened person with whom I can live as I have lived with you.”

“ By Almighty God,” said the dying bishop, “ I do not know many really devout men. All the devout men are dead except one who lives in Mosul. Go and seek him when I am no more.”

Selman went to Mosul and lived with this chosen master for some time. But it was not long before this holy and aged man also showed signs of approaching death. So Selman said to him :

“ The Bishop of Damascus advised me on his death-bed to come to you, assuring me that you were like himself. I came and I have lived here with you ; now God’s decision is at hand. To whom can I turn when you are no more ? ”

This dying man then sent him to another monk whom he found as devout and good as the two pre-

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ceding ones, and who, when his time came, died, telling Selman of another ascetic who lived in the country of the Rum. So Selman went to live amongst the Byzantines. He remained in this country attending to certain business there.

At the death, however, of his last master, he resolved to return to Arabia, and with this object in view joined some Arab traders of the Banu Kilab. The caravan crossed the desert, the country of Midian, reaching the fertile Oasis of Wadil Qora. But once arrived the traitorous Banu Kilab, ready to make money out of everything and even sell men (like their ancestors whom the brothers of Joseph, Jacob's son, encountered long before), sold the unfortunate Selman to a Jew of the Banu Qoraïdha who lived in Yathrib, Medina of the future.

The poor Persian was conducted into this town, bought by a cousin of the first Jew, and lived in slavery, working to improve his master's palm-groves. He attended to the camel that turned the wheel bringing water from the subsoil into the well-arranged little trenches distributed amongst the various proprietors. Water was the most precious of all subterranean treasures, more valued than gold or silver ; the irrigation had to be continuous to prevent the soil from becoming barren from the salty deposits, and constant watch was kept over the camel at the wheel and the leather bottles, trickling with water as they were carried up and down.

The Oasis of Yathrib was exceptionally rich and fertile and the moisture was continually renewed by the Wadi Idham's irrigation trenches, by the wells, by the canals and the stores of water collected in the volcanic rocks, whose disintegration kept the earth rich and fertile—fertility paid for dearly in other

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respects, for the fever of Yathrib was celebrated throughout Arabia. Everyone, new arrivals most of all, paid tribute to this pernicious malaria. Often the excrement of neighbouring herds leaked into the ponds and wells, and their stagnant contents took on a disquieting yellow colour resembling henna. Even the camels fell sick when they drank it. The stream of Bothan generally flowed with fetid water.

The Jews had set up an immense agricultural activity in Yathrib and the palm-groves were greatly improved. Living also in the Oasis were Arabs from Yemen, who finally outnumbered the disciples of Moses. The different tribes were divided into two confederations, the Aws and the Khazraj (these were the most numerous) and were particularly allied to the Jewish tribes of the Qoraïdha, the Nadhir and the Qaïnoqa.

Although oppressed by an unhealthy climate these sedentary Arabs of Yathrib were rather refined, though indolent. They devoted themselves entirely to agriculture and had neither the enterprising spirit nor the commercial daring of the Qoraishites of Mecca, the other important town of the Hijaz, prosperous because of its financial speculating and caravan trade. The Aws and the Khazraj ridiculed the Qoraishites and at the same time admired them. They jested about these grasping, gold-stuffed bankers of Mecca who, in return, laughed at the heavy cultivators of Yathrib riddled with malaria and oppressed by Jewish supremacy.

Selman worked thus for several years in the Jew's service. He was inconsolable at having left civilized Syria with its holy Christian preachers. The narrow nationalism of the Jews shocked him no less than the idolatry of the Arabs who worshipped a lump of stone

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in vague human form, naming it Manât and pouring blood over it periodically. Yet, ten years after the Persian's arrival a strange religious movement disturbed the town. There was talk of a Prophet newly come to Mecca, who wished to destroy the idols, spoke familiarly with God and his angels and recited rhythmic verses composed with such perfection of style that many wept upon hearing them. He had threatened the unfaithful with punishments from heaven, talked of the end of the world and the apocalyptic terrors thereof, as if all this soon must befall ; he had spoken of infernal torments and paradisical delights in such terms as to unhinge the mind.

This Prophet, they reported, was very badly received by his compatriots. The Qoraishites of Mecca laughed at him and regarded him as a fool or madman, while plotting his destruction. He might come to Yathrib for protection, perhaps. Several men of this town, having gone to Mecca on the traditional pilgrimage to the holy Ka'ba, saw him and returned enthusiastic ; many, it appeared, had solemnly declared their fidelity and were hoping for his coming. Soon, however, there was more precise news ; for the Prophet sent his missionaries to Yathrib with instructions to give out his message, spread abroad and establish his religion.

One of these missionaries, Mus'ab ben 'Omaïr, lodged with As'ad ben Zurara, a townsman of Yathrib, and gathered the new converts in his house or in the enclosure belonging to Dhafar's son, although some people protested.

Among the malcontents were two important persons, Sa'd ben Mo'adh and his friend, Osaïd ben Khozaïr ; the latter went one day to the enclosure where Mus'ab was proselytizing and said to him bitterly :

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“ What are you doing amongst us ? Ensnaring the weak ? We hardly like that. If you value your life you will do well to go.”

“ Sit down with us and listen,” said Mus‘ab gently. “ Do not condemn without knowing, but judge for yourself. If what you are about to hear displeases you, we will part willingly.”

“ Well, so be it ! I am listening,” grumbled Osaïd, knitting his brows, although a little appeased by Mus‘ab’s gentleness. And after driving his pike into the earth, he sat cross-legged on the ground near it. Mus‘ab was in the centre of the circle of listeners who were surrounded by another circle of long lances and thick-set javelins.

“ *Bismillah er rahmân er rahîm*,” they said in beautiful, harmonious prose, with rhymes or assonances. “ In the name of God, merciful without bounds, and compassionate.”

They sang the verses gravely but in so easy and majestic a style that the Arabs, so sensitive to all music and poetry, chanted in unison, giving the effect of a great breath from another world where nothing existed but grandeur and poetry.

*Alhamdulillâhî rabbi’l  
Er rahmân er rahîm,  
Mâlikiyawm ed dîn,  
Iyâka na’budu wa iyâka naâla ‘in. . . .*

Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures,  
The most merciful and compassionate,  
The king of the day of judgment !  
Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. . . .

The Arabs’ impressions are extremely vivid. These tall, slender, angular people, burnt by the sun, scarred by the winds filled with fine particles of sand, bathed

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in hard, dry air, are intensely sensitive even though plunged in the daily battle against the pitiless elements. Their reactions are rapid and violent. Sensual or poetic emotions enter their souls like a sting.

Osaïd did not hesitate, nor did he think of combating his enthusiasm. After hearing certain passages from the Koran and learning the elements of the new Prophet's religion from Mus'ab, he declared himself converted to Islam, and gave himself to God. He at once performed his first ablutions and, pointing upwards, bore witness to heaven :

“ *La ilaha ill” Allah. Mohammad rasoul Allah.*”

“ There is but one God, Allah, and Mahomet is his Prophet.”

In his enthusiasm he now thought only of gaining new adherents.

“ Sa'd must also be conquered,” he said, “ and he will influence his followers amongst the Aws.”

And the next day Sa'd ben Mo'adz was conducted to Mus'ab, who taught in As'ad's house. He began by abusing this man (who was also his cousin), reproaching him for lodging strangers with hidden intrigues. But he, too, was struck with the gentleness of this reciter of the Koran, and the splendour of the verses.

“ Children of 'Abdelashhal ! ” he cried, on leaving, “ what am I to you ? ”

“ Your are our *sayyid*, our chief,” they replied, “ you are the wisest and most eminent amongst us.”

“ Well ! Then I swear not to speak with any amongst you until he believes in Allah and his Prophet.”

And so the new religion spread little by little throughout Yathrib, but not without some resistance, however. Among the Aws, Abu Qaïs ben el Aslat, the poet, kept up his part for idolatry by ridiculing

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the newly-converted Mahometans in his verses and by praising the religion of his ancestors.

'Amr ben el Jomuh, a respected old man, owned a wooden statue of the goddess Manât. One night some young men of the Banu Salama converted to Islam broke into his house, seized the idol and plunged it head downward into the privy. The next day the indignant 'Amr washed the statue and put it back in place. But the wild young men renewed the exploit several times and, finally, the old man, cursing the profaners but astonished that fire from heaven had not consumed them, hooked a naked sabre into the idol's neck. . . .

"If you have the least power, defend yourself now!" he said.

The young men returned once more and, replacing the sabre with the corpse of a dog, threw the whole thing into the well. And suddenly 'Amr was converted to Islam and wrote a poem to shame the powerless idol.

"By Almighty God, had you been a Divinity you would not now be in a well with a dead dog," he said. "Oh! your woeful impotence has been found out."

The monotheistic Jews would have had a great religious influence had they not made certain reservations in this respect, keeping the Bible nearly secret and considering the divine revelations a little like the personal property of their race. (The Koran censures them for this.) These Jews, while living exactly the same lives as merchants, agriculturists and warriors, speaking their language and writing poetry with a similar virtuosity, scorned these amiable, uncultivated *ummiyûn* Arabs, unprovided with the revealed Book, who strongly reciprocated the

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sentiment. Still, their presence at Yathrib prepared the way for Islam. They had in their train certain men of intelligence to settle questions.

The chief of the Aws-Allah abandoned himself to a kind of asceticism and preached a new religion made up of Paganism and Judaism ; he noticed with displeasure the opposition of the Mahometans. The Arabs were more and more confronted with religious problems in spite of their lack of mysticism. Christianity encircled the peninsula and penetrated a certain number of the tribes. Along with the grains and Syrian stuffs, the caravans brought traces of ideas and customs from Rum into the centre of the Hijaz. Even the poets began to speak of one God. Omayya ben Abi's-salt sang of the delights of paradise in green gardens and of the infernal horrors.

The name of *hanifs* was given, so it seemed, to certain pious persons dissatisfied with the rude idolatry and who, without knowing exactly what, were searching for a more genuine faith. Among the Christians of the Orient the expectation of the approaching end of the world, so deep-rooted and apprehensive in the early documents, had not disappeared. Eschatological ideas prevailed even more among the ascetics of the desert with whom the Arabs had direct dealings. In the north of the peninsula certain Christian sects seemed to be awaiting the advent of a prophet heralding the end of time. This belief had even overtaken pagans like Zohair, the father of the poet Ka'b who died before the coming of Mahomet.

The poet of Taif, Omayya ben Abi's-salt, had read the Judeo-Christian books ; he scorned the idols, drank no wine, and wore a hair-shirt. He would have been greatly pleased to receive the calling of prophet, but waited in vain. One day when he was

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travelling in Syria with the caravan of Abu Sofyan, the rich Meccan Chief, he entered a Christian church and talked for a long time with the preacher. When he came out his companions noticed a certain emotion in his face. He continued on the road with them and when their business was finished and they were returning by the same route, Omayya again went into the church. He came out, this time, quite agitated.

“What has come over you?” asked the sceptic Abu Sofyan. “Why are you delaying us with your fuss about monks?”

“Let me be! Let me be!” murmured the poet; he continued: “The preacher revealed to me that Christ returned six times and that we are approaching the hour. When he talked to me first I was moved, for I greatly desired to be the chosen one for the work of the Lord and I feared that the mission had escaped me. So with troubled spirit, I watched for signs. Then, this time, when the preacher said to me: ‘The prophet is come,’ I was in despair.”

Omayya never forgave Mahomet; all his life he fought against him with his satires. Had he a rather innocent mind? While he looked upon the sacred mission as a personal honour and coveted it with a feeling which, though perhaps noble, was not unmixed with vanity, we shall see Mahomet receiving Omayya trembling and asking himself if he would have the strength to fill it. After all, say the commentators, Omayya could not have been chosen, for being a poet, he must have been inspired by a spirit (*a jinn*), as the Prophet was by an angel.

Selman reflected about all these things. Had not his last master said to him, on his death-bed, there in the country of the Rum:

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"This age is an age of Prophets. A prophet will be sent."

And so when Mahomet reached Yathrib (Medina) Selman was soon amongst his most fervent adherents.

Between his shoulder-blades near the neck, Mahomet had a sort of tumour or round excrescence of flesh as large as a Byzantine dinar with a tuft of hairs in it. He had refused to have it removed by a doctor and the people looked upon it as the "Seal of Prophecy". Selman very much wanted to see this sign. One day when Mahomet was sitting out of doors with some friends the Persian approached and greeted him, seating himself behind the Prophet. Mahomet, divining what Selman desired and saying nothing, threw back his mantle showing his naked back. Selman wept and kissed the Seal of Prophecy.

As a slave Selman could not accompany this man, who was now the centre of his life, step by step as he wished ; but at last he became one of the principal members of the new sect. Mahomet finally advised him to free himself, as he could do by cultivating three hundred palm-trees for his master ; his Mahometan brothers helped him, and the Prophet donated an ingot of gold to complete the sum.

What, then, was this man whose flight<sup>1</sup> from Mecca to Medina began a new era for a large portion of humanity ?

<sup>1</sup> The Hegira : Mahomet's flight, 622 years after Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### THE YEAR OF THE ELEPHANT

*Every Arab is a tradesman,  
and sometimes a thief.*

Strabo.

**A**T about the end of the sixth century of the Christian era, an army advanced against Mecca. Abraha, the Abyssinian viceroy of Yemen, came to seek vengeance for a profanation of the Temple of San'a by an Arab of the Hijaz ; the Christians of the southern peninsula had hoped to make a centre of pilgrimage of this temple to rival the antique Ka'ba.

As we have said, Christianity had actually spread throughout southern Arabia in spite of the opposition of the Jews and the idolaters. At the beginning of the sixth century a Jewish king, Dhu Nowas, had fought the Christians of Najran and had burned, they say, twenty thousand of them in an enormous cave transformed into a furnace. The Byzantine Emperor, Justinian I, was not able himself to travel so far to avenge the faith, but persuaded the Negus of Abyssinia to invade Yemen. The black Christians of Africa, having crossed the straits, destroyed the remains of the Himyarite Empire, formerly so prosperous and civilized.

The Negus ordered his representative to kill one third of the male population, to carry into Ethiopia one-third of the women as captives, and to lay waste one-third of the Yemenite territory. The ruthlessness with which the black chief carried out this task made him unpopular ; Abraha, one of his lieutenants, saw

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that he could easily fill his place, so killed him in single combat. The furious Negus swore that he would plant his feet upon the soil of Yemen and cut off Abraha's hair ; but this man, wittily enough, shaved his own head and sent his locks together with a bag of Yemenite earth to the Negus, who was thus exonerated from his vow and pacified. Abraha became an almost independent viceroy. The holy Bishop Gregentius drew up a code, converted many Jews and idolaters, and the Abyssinian monarch, now firmly established in southern Arabia, was ready to march to the conquest of the Hijaz, Mecca and the Ka'ba.

Abraha advanced on his elephant with a well-organized army which easily outnumbered the Qoraishites ; he camped in front of the city, and the frightened townspeople sought shelter in the hills.

“ The shouts of these thousands of soldiers, dark as a storm-cloud, deafened the steeds, and their stench held their adversaries at bay. Demons as numerous as the grains of dust that dried the new-budding greenery—” said a poet.

Abraha never entered Mecca for, they say, his elephant refused of its own will to advance, and the army was decimated by an epidemic of smallpox (legend has it that the pustules contained stones thrown down from heaven by mysterious birds, the *ababil*), and turned back.

This year was called the “ Year of the Elephant ”, and the Arabs based their calendar upon it. In all likelihood Mahomet was born a little later. It marked the decadence of the Abyssinian power in Arabia. Two years after this, the Persians drove the blacks out of Yemen at the very time that they themselves were expelled by the Islamites.

Although the Qoraishites had so little to do with

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*Abraha's downfall, they prided themselves on it and called themselves "the heroes". Mecca was now more than ever the great centre of commerce and pilgrimage.*

Certainly it was not a very enviable place to live in.

"If Mecca could stir up longings you would see Himyarite princes hurrying there at the head of their warriors. Winter and summer are alike intolerable there. Nowhere in Mecca do the springs gush forth as at Jowatha. "Not a blade of grass to rest the eye . . . no hunting . . . Instead, only merchants, that most contemptible of all professions . . ."

That is how the negro poet, El Haiqatân, depicted it.

No tree worthy of the name spread its shadows, and long ago they had cut down the shrubs near the Temple of the Ka'ba, in spite of the superstitious respect attached to them. Neither were there any surrounding gardens or orchards as at Damascus or Fez to-day, encircled by their pleasant, fresh greenery ; only some spiny bushes with leaves like spikes grew on the arid slopes.

Summer in Mecca was almost intolerable. The rich went when they could to spend it at Taîf in the Thaqifite Mountains, where excellent grapes were cultivated ; this was the only spot in Arabia where water froze in winter.

The sun made the large, black flag-stones surrounding the Ka'ba so hot that they had to be sprinkled for the ritual, barefooted procession ; but the stones dried immediately. When the first Mahometans were tortured it was quite sufficient to stretch them out naked on the ground. The faithful, courageous enough to endure this torrid heat, were called blessed by Mahomet, and meritorious. Mecca suffered, too,

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from lack of water ; for that of the noted wells of Zemzem was irregular and often bitter. The other wells were far-off and unsafe. When the pilgrims came they drew water with the greatest difficulty, using any receptacles they could lay hands on, and then it was not an easy task to fill them. "Suffocating heat, deathly winds, clouds of flies . . ." said the geographer, El Maqdisi.

Winter was no more agreeable—after the furnace, the bog. The city was crescent-shaped with its points meeting at the gorges of Mt. Qo'aïqi'an, while the centre, where the Ka'ba in its sacred square (*mesjid*) was situated, formed an enclosed hollow which filled with the waters from the torrential rains : no turf or trees or deep soil gripped the rock to hold them back.

The square of the Ka'ba, much smaller than it is to-day, received all the water disgorged from the steep passes ; the flood carried everything before it through the sloping streets and, when it subsided, left a sea of mud floating with rubbish and filth. The wells of Zemzem were filled in several times, and once they were lost for several generations. The mud had to be removed in carts and the people were obliged to climb up to the door of the temple with a ladder. It happened on just such a day of rain that the godly Ibn Zubair, determined not to abandon his daily *tawâf* (the seven processional rounds of the Ka'ba), made them, they say, by swimming.

On several occasions the water rose as far as the famous Black Stone, or to the height of a medium-sized man. The Ka'ba was reconstructed each time after being destroyed or damaged by the different inundations in the course of centuries. (Formerly it was built of burnt brick ; now it is of freestone.)

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By a distressing paradox, when the rains and torrent everywhere else in the peninsula brought blessings, covering the soil with greenery, washing the salty sheathes from the plants, freeing the land from want for months to come, at Mecca the water only caused devastation. It destroyed the houses, killed the animals, carrying with it the unburied carrion, and spreading temporary epidemics which added to the endemic ophthalmia. The movements of the pilgrims sometimes gave rise to smallpox and the plague. Hygienic conditions were odious. Even to-day in Mecca the people empty the contents of the latrines outside the doors of their houses and cover them with a little earth ; the pilgrimages occasion very high mortality.

Nevertheless the Qoraishites of Mecca were prosperous, intelligent, attached to their city and biassed in its favour. What advantage did they find there ? Commerce. "It is only because of commerce that we remain," they said when Mahomet made life particularly difficult for them.

These former nomads, so lately settled there, admirably understood and made the best of a privileged situation in a place so little favoured in all other respects. They succeeded in making it a sort of Venice of the desert ; their caravans crossed it in every direction between Yemen and Syria.

"Every Arab is a tradesman," as Strabo said, "and sometimes a thief," he added. Amongst all the Arabs the Qoraishites had the greatest sense of trade ; they based their commercial operations on a financial and banking organization extremely peculiar. The first merchants mentioned in the Bible are the Arabs ; Isaiah and Ezekiel enumerate the provisions that they carried into Syria and they may be

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regarded as the first exploiters of international commerce.

The ancient Romans were unable to do without them. Horace mentions the treasures of Arabia and the trade which made the inhabitants wealthy. Yemen of antiquity can be compared to Peru of more modern times. The precious metals, the silks and perfumes of the Orient cost the luxurious Romans dear, and Pliny remarked complainingly : “ *Tantae nobis deliciae constant . . .* ”<sup>1</sup> upon paying many *sesterces* to the Bedouins for these things.

The commercial prosperity of Arabia in general and of Mecca in particular depended on the route to India. The Arabs were rich or poor according to whether the road passed by the North, by Mesopotamia, Persia, Afghanistan, or by Yemen, the Persian Gulf and the Peninsula. These alterations took place several times as the centuries passed, following the changes in the Government.

At the beginning of the seventh century long wars between the Greeks and the Persians favoured the trade of Mecca. The city of the Qoraishites became a great cross-road between the Orient and the Mediterranean world and between black Africa and Byzantine Syria. Moreover, round about it were held periodically a series of markets which stimulated home commerce, like the fairs in the surrounding neighbourhood of ‘Okadh. Pilgrimage and commerce, religion and business, were intimately connected in this respect.

The Byzantines could not do without the Bedouin caravans which brought precious stones and spices from the mysterious Indies, skins, metals, exotic stuffs, silks from China for the garments of emperors,

<sup>1</sup> “ So dear cost our delights. . . . ”

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courtesans and priests; the perfumes of Magian kings and incense from Yemen and African gums for the churches and palaces. The Arabs also brought into Syria dates from the Hijaz and Nedj. They carried back grain, dried raisins, oil; linens, cotton and silk materials, bordered, striped and flowered; manufactured products and even arms—fine Damascus blades and embossed shields of which Byzantium, the protector and friend of monopolies, had forbidden the exportation but which the Bedouins smuggled through.

The arrival and departure of caravans was a great event in the life of Mecca. When the arrival of one was announced a sort of delirium seized the people and they ran in front of it shouting and beating drums. Mahomet finally forbade this custom to discourage speculation and the buying-up of the wares by the first arrivals. He had trouble in suppressing this commercial fever and the Koran gives us the echo of his bitterness in describing how, on the arrival of a caravan, he was deserted by his entire audience while preaching.

Besides the small, private caravans, the Qoraishites had two large and regular ones—in summer to Yemen and in the winter to Syria. These great expeditions were an event interesting the entire population because of a very perfect system of credit which allowed the poorest people to join in a subscription for as little as a half-dinar, earning at least fifty and sometimes a hundred per cent.

Actually, the vast operation of these armies of 2,000 or 3,000 camels carrying gold, silver, leather and precious goods, escorted by 200 or 300 men, conveyed hope to the whole town from across the sands, the steppes and the reddish stones of the desert.

Mecca was a plutocratic, commercial republic.

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The Government there was not well-defined and the different clans would have rebelled against any individual supremacy or any absolute organized power.

The council of notables, or the *mala*, an assembly without fixed mandate, always exercised a general directorship. For important cases they met at the Council House or the *dar en nadwa*, and the vote was decided by the magic of eloquence. This House was open to notables, old men, and to rich plebians like Ibn Jodhâ̄n the Taïmite, formerly horse-dealer and slave-trader ; to good speakers, even if young and poor like 'Otba ben Rabi'a, and to those who indulged in fitting answers and cutting replies.

Abu Sofyan was endowed with the following gifts : nobility (he belonged to the Ommayad clan), wealth (he was foremost amongst the merchant-bankers), political judgment and understanding of the common good (he possessed to the highest degree what they called *hilm*) ; he had obtained there a powerful position and a real supremacy.

Bat'ha, the aristocratic quarter, was in the flat part of the town in whose hollow was the square of the Ka'ba, the meeting-place of a number of small streets named after the clans. The famous bankers of the noble family of the Ommayads lived there, as did the wealthy Makhzumites who specialized in the trade of slaves and woven materials ; the Nawfal ; the Asad ; the Zohra ; the Sahm ; the 'Abdeddar, defenders of the banner ; the 'Adi and the Taïm, less noble and less respected (the clans of the future caliphs Abu Bakr and 'Omar) ; the Hashimites, Mahomet's family so ill-favoured by wealth, however, in spite of the rôle that Hashim and 'Abdelmottalib played as guardians of the Ka'ba and dispensers of water to pilgrims.

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Round about this central quarter, in the sloping streets, lived the common people without rights or fortune but who furnished the soldiers. Last of all, on the outskirts of the city lodged the rabble of "métèques", refugees and the artisan slaves.<sup>1</sup>

Bat'ha and particularly the *mejlis* of the Ka'ba were the important business centres. Here the illustrious Qoraishites came to spend the evening, to talk, to hear or to tell the news, discuss the interests of the city and to plan their business. Abu Sofyan, Abu Jahl 'Abdelmottalib, the 'Otba, Walid ben Moghîra, Safwan ben Omayya, made a habit of sitting before the temple door, their buttocks on their heels, wrapped magnificently in their *ridas*.

Here, the great summer and winter caravans were arranged ; here, they heard the news of the Persians' last victory over the Rum, of Chosroes' (Kesra's) triumph or of Cæsar's (Qaisar's) defeat ; here, they listened to Mahomet's first sermons, dumb-founded and then furious ; here they framed his excommunication ; here they were informed of the astonishing victory of Badr ; and it was here, one day, that they watched his triumphant return to his own land after many misfortunes and saw him seize the gold ring of the Ka'ba and proclaim his forgiveness.

From this Bourse and Palais Royal of Mecca they could wander to the distant quarters near the mountain gorges where ravines formed the streets ; there the *sugs* swarmed like humming bee-hives with mixed crowds and the women-singers accompanied their sharp melodies on little square timbrels (*def's*) ; there the shopkeepers questioned the timid Bedouins in the hope of drawing out of them some of the *dirhems*

<sup>1</sup> Métèques : a name given in Athens to foreigners living permanently there.

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knotted carefully in the corners of their tunics. The money-changers congregated in this quarter to weigh their rough ingots and variously stamped coins of Greek, Persian or Himyarite origin, many of them old and worn, to measure gold-dust by the bushel, to count dinars bearing the portrait of the King of the Rum, then at a premium in Arabia. The poets compared the lustre of their ladies' cheeks to these bright pieces.

Here lived the hangers-on (*halif*) of the patricians; the "apaches" (*khali'*) banished for some crime from their tribes; travelling-pedlars showed their wares in improvised booths or under palm-leaf tents, for they could not afford to rent the expensive shops of the town. Many foreigners either lived here or passed through, amongst them Jews, but mostly Christians of different sects having lost touch with their orthodox centres. Mahomet found this plebian crowd instructive and gained many of his first adherents from amongst them.

Besides this intelligent activity, in everyone was to be found the same fever for work, for money and for speculation—from the merchant with the open-air stall and the small shopkeeper to the important business man controlling many secretaries, whose ledgers, embellished with seals and skilful handwriting, called forth much derision from the ignorant Bedouins. These people did not allow their money to lie idle; it must circulate and draw interest whether in millions or in a few drachmas. No risk was too great for them, no sort of dealing unknown to people like 'Abderrahman ben 'Awf "who could find a treasure under every stone"; to Howaïtib ben 'Abedl'ozza, suddenly become rich because of the accidental death of fifty members of his clan; to Safwan ben Omayya

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who marketed arms and silver both wrought and unwrought ; to Walid ben Moghîra who, to advertise his draper's shop, annually provided the great veil of the Ka'ba ; to Abu Ohaïha to whom the bank subscribed thirty thousand dinars at one time for one caravan : (this only represented a portion of his wealth, for he had other property at Taïf and plantations and mines in the Bedouin country ; his daughters were supposed to be the richest heiresses in Mecca . . .). These people knew how to take risks and no kind of business was foreign to them.

These bold speculators also enjoyed the pleasures of life. Often, after their rough journeys, they gave themselves up to pleasure and cheerfully spent their enormous profits. Streams of wine flowed in the great houses of Bat'ha as well as in the apaches' hovels on the edge of the town. 'Abdallah ben Jodh'ân owned two girl-singers celebrated for their voices and for their beauty, whom he called " 'Abdallah's two cicadas ". Once when drunk he gave Omayya a black eye but, as an indemnity, presented this crony with the two girls and a thousand dirhems. El 'Aci ben Hisham carried his passion for gaming so far as to play himself and temporarily lost his freedom to Abu Lahab's benefit. Credit was favourable to commerce, but speculation brought about crises. Ibn Jodh'ân, when most lavish, sent out town-criers to invite all the people to his feasts whereas at other times he had to suspend payment. The wealthy El 'Aci on one occasion could not collect four thousand dirhems on credit.

They speculated on the rate of exchange and the fluctuations of money. They gambled on the rise and fall of foreign produce, on the arrival and departure of caravans, on the uncertainty of the harvests or

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crops, on the unripe dates (the Koran forbids this), on the herds and the spoils of war. They monopolized the cereals and sold fictitious commodities.

Notwithstanding his admiration for his intelligent compatriots, Mahomet was obliged to condemn all loans on interest as usury, and also all limited transactions and trading in moneys. At the age of twenty-five he was one of the founders of a league, the *hilf el fodhûl*, for the protection of the down-trodden and the correction of agreements. The members feasted at Ibn Jodh'ân's house and then poured the water of Zemzem over the corner-stone of the Ka'ba, taking oath as they drank together.

The poor Bedouins were really a prey to dishonest buyers, untrustworthy agents, bankrupts, suspicious guides offering themselves as intermediaries to "the secret of making money without capital". They were the victims of usurers who made them sign notes for two dinars, only giving them one ; who knew "seventy-three tricks to vary usury" and extracted double and treble interest from them by multiplying the payments and increasing the interest when the payments were not made.

Sometimes the debtors, so hard to seize, got their own back, and ridiculed these citizens in their turn, denouncing the Qoraishites' greediness and declaring that according to etymology, Qoraish meant "shark".

"Ah!" jeered the Bedouin poet, Abu't Tamahan, "if my camel could hear the tricks of trade, what a lot she could gain in Mecca by exchanging green grass for dried grass!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE IMPIOUS WAR

*Throughout the centuries, we have the sight  
Of those who were the first to lead  
Being pushed into the sloughs of death,  
And rescued never.*

*I saw my people—the great, the petty, all—  
Flow with them, and I said :  
Where go my people, I in turn, shall go.*

Quss.

**A**T the beginning of the summer the young Amina, of Mecca, was looking for a nurse for her two months' old son. She had just lost her husband, the handsome 'Abdallah, old 'Abdelmottalib's son, who had died at the age of 25, leaving the orphan a small inheritance, five camels, some sheep, and an old negress.

During the season many Bedouin women came to Mecca to find foster-children, the offspring of rich people in preference. None of them was anxious to look after an orphan from a rather poor family. Halima, however, the wife of a shepherd, of the Banu Sa'd, accepted the young Mahomet because she had not found another baby and took him away to her tribe in the fresh mountains, some stages south of Mecca towards Taif.

The child lived with her for five years playing with his foster-brother and tending the sheep with him, for, they say, every Prophet has been a shepherd-boy in his youth. We are told—but Allah is the most knowing—that one day Halima's son saw two unknown persons dressed in white, two angels, who

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came up to the four-year-old Mahomet and, laying him on the ground, cleaved open his breast, washed it with the whitest snow and taking from his heart a black stain, closed up the flesh again and disappeared mysteriously. This legend is only based on a verse from the Koran (sura xciv) which says: "*Have we not opened thy breast and have we not removed the burden that thou hast carried?*" , a wholly mystical operation, the opening and cleansing of a heart destined to receive without reserve and transmit faithfully the divine message, thus bearing the heavy burden of its mission. This legend of the opened breast offers, moreover, certain dogmatic interest. The black stain removed by the angels can be likened to the stigma of original sin from which only Mary and Jesus were free. The cleansing of the heart takes a well-known place in mystic symbolism.

At the age of six Mahomet lost his mother. As she was bringing him from Yatrib to Mecca, Amina died at Abwa where they buried her. Mahomet now had no protectors but the old negress, his grandfather and his uncles. 'Abdelmottalib took him in and loved him tenderly. Often, the old man spent the evening in the square shadowed by the Ka'ba where the principal men of Qoraish gathered in groups. A carpet was spread for him and the grown sons whom he had had by six different wives ; seated around him on the bare earth out of respect, were the gentle Abu Tâlib, the fierce 'Abdel'ozza, the grasping 'Abbas. His grandfather allowed Mahomet to sit close beside him on the carpet and gently caressed his shoulder. He had another son, Hamza, of the same age as Mahomet, and during his first days in the world Mahomet had had as a nurse a freed slave of his uncle, 'Abdel'ozza, who also gave suck to Hamza,

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making the latter both uncle and foster-brother to the Prophet.

When 'Abdelmottalib died, at the age of eighty, Mahomet, then but eight years old, was adopted by his uncle, Abu Tâlib, who brought him up devotedly. Although purveyor to the Ka'ba as well as guardian, Abu Tâlib was no longer wealthy and could give only a very ordinary education to his ward ; Mahomet was more likely destined to become a commercial trader than a scholar. During the greater part of his life, he could neither read nor write, it was said.

They say—but Allah is the most knowing—that his uncle took him into Syria by caravan during the month of Rabi". At that season the desert was in full splendour. The first winter rains had brought life and plenty and the peninsula was as prosperous as it ever could be. The grass grew richly to the satisfaction of the camels, whose humps swelled almost visibly as they ate their favourite pasture, the curious *sa'dan* resembling nothing but most unappetising bunches of thorns. With delight the Bedouins saw their herds spreading over the steppes. With the end of their staves they dug up the wild artichokes and the succulent truffles growing everywhere. Even the *nofuds*, those sinister stretches of sand as red as blood and as white as camphor, lost their terror, and could be traversed without danger. And the mournful dunes were covered with a carpet of growth, twining aromatic plants, euphorbiaceae and the tiniest flowers—those dunes from twenty to fifty yards high of sand chewed up by the winds and so shifting that there was danger of the camels sinking into them in winter. Now, there was no longer risk of slipping into some gulf of quicksand. The ewes and she-camels, their teats

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swollen with milk, were put out to grass by the poorer tribes, and the gazelles found shelter in various wooded nooks.

For a time, at least, the people escaped from the tormenting struggle for life and the anxiety of possible starvation. They were no longer reduced to seeking nourishment in leaves or the roots of the wild dwarf palm at the end of summer. The bellies and bottoms of the young Bedouins became as plump and round and soft as those of the little dogs of the Douar. The mounted brigands of the desert left off attacking caravans, became shepherds again, suddenly returning to the habits of their ancestors, and led a pastoral life tending their stolen flocks. Before, these terrible *lusūs* or outlaws of the patriarchal fraternity were banned by their tribe, feared by travellers, sung by the poets and dreamed of by women.

Now, the caravans moved towards the North, the civilized country of Christian monks, Roman soldiers and enchanting cities. As they followed the thousand-year-old road, they passed the rich, Jewish city of Khaïbar at the right, with its flowering palm-groves and volcanic *harra* still vomiting muddy lava, the vast plain of black, burnt-out stones of Gehenna. They reached Hijr, then the Banu 'Odhra's lands, sung by the platonic love-poets, "dying when they love" and unresigned to extinguishing their ethereal ardour in the material joys of possession.

The long valley scattered with villages and the rich Oasis of Wadi'l Qora bloomed in a sea of palms. From time to time the caravan passed a convent. They liked these monasteries of dried brick with their hospitable monks. Lodged in the shelving rocks were small, natural lakes providentially filled by the winter rains, where swam little black fish excellent

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for eating. The monks allowed the travellers to draw this clear water much to their delight, for during the greater part of the journey there was only well-water for drinking, and that was usually brackish and unhealthy, unless, luckily, they found by digging in certain places under the protective layer of fine sand, water, fresh and "*clear as the crystal of a raven's eye*".

During the painful journeys the camel-drivers improvised long, lyrical melodies or recited the satires of news-bringing poets. The jumping-hares took flight. The strange colocynth bloomed unexpectedly in the most arid sand. At the top of a far-off dune, the slender, restless gazelle poised for a moment in profile before taking flight.

At night the guide chose the most suitable spot for the caravan to rest. They ate a little meat, dates and boiled barley, and reposed before sleeping beside a fire of camels' dung and fragrant boughs of shrubs, talking together under the lucid sky and wonderful, shining stars. The young Mahomet loved to listen to the conversation of the older men, to the adventures of travellers, to the marvellous stories and legends of olden times, some of which were connected with the very places that they passed. The caravan trailed along the endless, narrow, winding path bordered by strangely-formed rocks at the foot of the mountains—rounded and grooved into abysses and running down, funnel-shaped, to the clay. For was this not the country of the Thamudites, one of the lost races of ancient Arabia, and destroyed long ago, oh ! long ago before the Patriarch Abraham ? These arrogant giants were cursed by God for not listening to the Prophet Salih, who had the power to change a block of stone into a living camel. But the Thamudites killed the

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animal and a terrible wail resounded in the heavens and all the impious fell down dead. The caverns in the rocks where this race lived could still be seen.

The desert was peopled with *jinns*. These spirits sometimes breathed during the night and maliciously made the saddles fall down ; or they took the shape of huge lakes of blue water and green palm-trees, luring the thirsty traveller by false mirages and leading him where nothing but death awaited. Sometimes they surrounded the caravan with dark clouds, invoked spouts, whirling columns from veiled skies, or tempests of sand as fine as wheat-flour which blinded their eyes, burnt their skin, dried their throats and made their mouths bleed.

And at times the sands sang ; then could be heard strange, clear, monotonous notes like wind blowing over the strings of a harp. Often they listened to a sort of unnatural laughter coming from nowhere, or diabolical chuckling both threatening and mocking. They would hurry across this strange valley, whipping on the beasts to get away quickly.

The first important town was Aila at the end of a gulf running in from the Red Sea. This large village, they say, was once inhabited by Jews who fell into idolatry and profaned the Sabbath. Their old people were changed into swine and their young ones into monkeys. At last after passing the Dead Sea, they arrived at Bosra, the principal exchange-centre between the Greeks and the Arabs, surrounded by its crenellated walls giving an adequate idea of the power of the Byzantines. It was while camping at the foot of these ramparts that Mahomet made the acquaintance of a learned monk, Bahîra. Mahometan tradition tells us that the ascetic had a presentiment that this young Arab was the great Prophet whose

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coming he had learned of in his books. Be that as it may, Syria had a great attraction for Mahomet. He always looked upon it as a land blessed by God over which the angels spread their wings. This land where Abraham hid after saving himself from the idolatry of Ur of Chaldea, this land of the mysterious *People of the Book*, this land of Jews possessing an unknown Bible and whom an earlier Prophet had conquered, now belonged to the Christians of Rum, those most powerful heritors of empires representing the most finished civilization.

Was the young Qoraishite already making comparisons between the Byzantines and the Arabs, between monotheism and idolatry ? Was he beginning to reflect on the religious questions which afterwards absorbed all his thought and energy, and to doubt the crude beliefs among which he had passed his childhood ?

Mahomet, still very young, made his first campaign beside his uncle in the war called *El Fijar* by the historians, or the Impious War, because it took place, in spite of the most sacred traditions, during the truce of the months devoted to pilgrimages—the period when all hostility, plunder and murder must cease for the time being in the peninsula.

During this “Truce of God” great annual fairs or markets were held in the neighbourhood of Mecca : during the first twenty days of the month of Dhulqa‘da, at ‘Okadh, a palm plantation between Taif and Nakhla, three stages from the town ; and immediately after the pilgrimage, still nearer at Majna and Dhulmejaz behind Mt. ‘Arafa.

The market at ‘Okadh was the most celebrated. The people came not only for the sake of commerce but also to amuse themselves. Important business,

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news retailed by the caravans from all parts, games, songs, dances and poetry, all contributed to make this fair the heart of activity and the centre of Arabia for the time being. To form the least idea of 'Okadh we must conjure up something between the Greek Olympic games and the *moussems* of Morocco to-day. At 'Okadh the poets competed among themselves by reading their works in public. Here, also, were recited the famous mu'allaqat, afterwards written in golden letters and suspended from the ceiling of the Ka'ba. The victor was entertained by everyone and became the most renowned poet of his tribe.

It was at 'Okadh, too, that religious ideas spread. Here the different cults of the peninsula were examined, and it appears that the Christians went there in great numbers from Hira or Nejran. That is how the young Mahomet first heard the well-known Quss ben Sa'ida, the Bishop of Nejran, when he went one day with his uncle to 'Okadh.

This old Bishop, with snowy beard, for long the great orator of the desert and the referee of the Arabs, harangued the people from the height of his brown camel with no other pulpit but its arched hump. Taking as witnesses the sky, the sea, the night, the horses, the stars, Quss preached the uselessness of wealth and position to this crowd of merchants and warriors. (Later, in the Koran, were written poetic addresses which bear a striking resemblance to some of the oldest *suras*, even to the words.) Eloquently, with stereotyped rhythms, he said or rather recited :

O mankind, hear and understand.  
He who lives must die, who dies is departed.  
What must be will be:  
Obscure night, sky adorned with stars,  
Heaving billows, sparkling planets,

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Light and darkness, justice and injustice,  
Food and drink, clothing and saddle-horses. . . .  
What do I see? Men go and return never.  
Does the bed please them so much that they rise from it never?  
Or forsaken, have they no one to waken them?

Thus he talked for long hours, unfolding in endless variety a succession of changing images, sentences, proverbs, clichés, never tiring the listener, who passionately loved these harmonious recitations, these "strung pearls" of a skilful artist. Many years later Mahomet remembered Quss preaching from the top of his brown camel and asked Abu Bakr to recite his words. Without a doubt, this was one of the first Christian influences he was submitted to.

A Kinani, Barrâdh ben Qaïs, a rake and drunkard disowned by his tribe and become one of the *khali'* outlaws whom we saw swarming in the distant quarters of Mecca, returned to that town and attached himself to Harb ben Omayya as a hanger-on (*halif*). There he recommenced his outrageous drinking and offences. Harb urged him to leave. He went, then, to No'man, the Lakhmide king of Hira, who sent a caravan every year to 'Okadh carrying musk and bringing back leather, cords and stuffs from Yemen. It was necessary to have a guide for the tribes whose territories they crossed. Barrâdh offered to conduct the caravan, with the protection of Kinana, to the Hijaz. At the same time 'Orwab ben er Rahhâl, of Hawazin, proposed himself to the king as the director of the caravan to the Hijaz by way of Nejd, promising to travel through these two countries unaided, and more successfully than a dog disowned by its own brothers. 'Orwa was chosen by No'man.

Barrâdh was furious and followed awaiting the opportunity for revenge. Scorning him too much to

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fear him, 'Orwa considered it unworthy to drive him off. But one day Barrâdh found him sleeping under a tree and coolly assassinated him, taking possession of the camels. Instead of blushing at his treachery, the *khali'* sang of his exploit in pompous verse. The murder was all the more odious because it took place in the month of Dhulqa'da during the Holy Truce.

While escaping with his plunder, Barrâdh met Bishr, the Qoraishite, and said to him :

"Hurry and warn the Qoraishites that the Hawazin will want to wreak vengeance on them."

"Mostly on you, I think."

"No. They will want more than the blood of one *khali'* to make amends for the blood of a chief."

Bishr went immediately to 'Okadh to caution his countrymen, who left hastily for Mecca.

It was nearly night when the Hawazin learned of 'Orwa's murder. They were enraged and instantly began the pursuit of the Meccans at the same time that the poet Labid improvised verses about the incident.

The Hawazin encountered the Qoraishites at sunset at Nakhla and the battle began. Harb was in the centre with the flag of Qosay, and 'Abdallah and Hisham at the two wings. The Qoraishites were less in number and withdrew towards Mecca, "like lizards into their holes." At the boundary (or *horm*) of the sacred territory the Hawazin stopped and shouted out :

"We will meet you next year at 'Okadh.' (There was no haste over this war ; guerilla-warfare was a sort of sport.)

"We shall be there," replied Abu Sofyan, at the order of his father, Harb.

The cynical Barrâdh went to Mecca, where he sold

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and squandered in his revelries the gains of his crime—King No‘man’s camels and perfumes. The bourgeois of Qoraish encouraged adventurers of this kind for they were useful as swordsmen. That is how these wasteful *bravi* carried on their business.

The following year the two factions prepared for war. The Hawazin reached ‘Okadh first and stationed themselves on a hill. The Qoraishites, under Harb’s command and with their allies, the Banu Kinana, established themselves near a ravine. At first the Qoraishites had the advantage and then fell back. Harb had ordered the Kinana to hold the rear and in no event to give way. But seeing their own allies, the Qoraishites, retreating, a part of the Kinana soldiers advanced while the others took to flight. And thus Mahomet engaged in another defeat of his people.

Two months later the armies met again at Abla not far from the market ; a new victory fell to the Hawazin.

Each side sent for reinforcements and the war was resumed on the same field at ‘Okadh. Omayya’s six sons (nicknamed the “ Lions ”), incensed at the three successive defeats, bound their own legs (as they did with camels to prevent them from running away), meaning that they were determined to conquer or to die. Crouching with one knee on the ground and the left calf tied to the right thigh with a cord, they showered arrows continually on to the enemy, certain of victory.

It was now the Qoraishite poets’ turn to sing of the victory in grandiloquent verse.

At the end of four years, peace was concluded on the following strange conditions frequent amongst those people living in clans : the dead on both sides

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were counted and the side having the least dead were compelled to pay blood-money to make the losses even. In short, the victor compensated the loser, with the result that the comparative strength of the clans remained as before. There were wars which never finished because the combatants demanded the same number of dead. Blood-money made a quicker settlement.

The Hawazin having lost twenty more men than their adversaries, the Qoraishites paid them an adequate compensation in money ; the result of this war gave rise to a great many poems—likewise a proverb stigmatizing the murderer who caused it :

“ More villainous than Barrâdh.”

## CHAPTER IV

### KHADIJA

*When I was poor, she enriched me ; when all the world abandoned me, she comforted me ; when they treated me as a liar, she believed in me.*

YOUNG Mahomet as a poor orphan practised several trades. He went to Yemen with Zubair, his uncle. At twenty, he was still forced to tend the herds some times, at his age a humiliating task generally given to slaves and girls. For some time he kept a little shop in Mecca, and on several occasions he acted as commercial agent or salesman in caravan expeditions.

Among the great fortunes of Mecca was that of the widow Khadija, of the Qoraishite tribe of the Asad, who had been twice married to Makhzumite bankers. With the aid of her father, Khowailid, and of several trustworthy men, her commercial business, of which she was her own director, had become one of the most important firms in this Venice of the desert. Her nephew, one of her employees, had travelled with Mahomet, and valuing the honesty, sincerity and prudence of that young man, recommended him to the widow. He took Mahomet to the widow, who was pleased with his appearance. The pleasant looks, manly beauty and open countenance of this young man of twenty-five inspired her best intentions towards him. She took him immediately into her service at a good wage.

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Mahomet became a trusted man in Khadija's employ and directed her caravans throughout the entire peninsula. His uncultivated mind developed by contact with various races and religions and improved through practical acquaintanceship with men. He passed through all sorts of regions—the uplands of Nejd, the valleys of Midian, the Sarat Mountains surrounding Taïf with their orchards of European fruit-trees, the 'Asir Mountains inhabited by barbarous tribes who marketed their young, nubile girls and generally lent their wives to their guests. He lived under the same tent with rough Bedouins who ate lizards and jumping-hares, who were practical but poetic, famished but ostentatious. And Khadija's business went on perfectly.

More and more satisfied with her handsome employee's merits, the widow wished to attach him finally to herself ; she opened up her plans to her slave, Maisara, who agreed to sound Mahomet. One evening she said to him :

"At your age, most men have at least one wife and several children, and some have even had time to get divorced already, why don't you marry ?"

"I earn my living now, without a doubt," said Mahomet who had had a hard time in the beginning, "but I have nothing of my own. I am without an income and have not even a father. Have I the means to pay a dowry and marry ?"

"Well ! Supposing you found a woman who did not need your money and who brought you beauty, wealth and rank at the same time . . . you would not have to worry about anything. Well ! What do you say ?"

"Of whom do you wish to speak ?" cried the young man, seizing the slave's arm. "What do you

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wish to say ? Who is the person in question ?  
Speak ! ”

“ Khadija.

“ How could that be possible ? ”

“ All is possible. Leave it to me ; do nothing and count on me.” And the slave went away without pushing the matter further, but leaving Mahomet to his meditations.

Next day Khadija sent a woman to say to her employee :

“ I want to be your wife.”

What woman wants . . . Khadija was successful, but, it would seem, not without a certain resistance on the part of her family, little flattered to see a rich Qoraishite connected with the distinguished Banu Makhzum marry an orphan without a penny and of a less-esteemed clan. The reflections that she must have heard about this misalliance with an employee can be imagined, not to speak of the allusions, flattering or otherwise, to her forty years and over. Gossips even said that she made her father—or her uncle—drunk after a good dinner, to force him to consent to the marriage.

Far from being a slave to her possessions, Khadija saw fit to regard her fortune only as a means to satisfy more readily the inclinations of her heart.

The marriage was celebrated joyfully. They say that Abu Tâlib paid a dowry of twenty camels, worth about five hundred dirhems, and gave a little lecture extolling the renown of Qoraish and the virtues of his brother's son, richer in true gifts of soul than in the fleeting gifts of fortune. Waraqa, Khadija's cousin, replied. The feast continued late into the night. The date-wine flowed in torrents and some leather bottles of precious grape-wine were also

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opened. In the interior court of the house, by the light of torches and innumerable stars in the Arabian sky, the bride's slave-girls danced and sang to the sound of tambourines. . . .

On the step of the house a camel was slaughtered and the poor people came to divide its flesh.

Khadija retained the management of her own fortune but provided for her husband's living.

In this trading republic where people were respected chiefly for their money, Mahomet became somewhat less disregarded. They admired his character, moreover, and gave him the nickname of *el amin*, the faithful, the sincere, the trustworthy, although he still played a rôle in the background and no one dreamed of placing him in the rank of the leading Qoraishites. But one day something happened, they say, to make him prominent.

In the year 605 the people of Mecca decided to build the Temple of the Ka'ba on more dignified lines. The old Ka'ba spoken of by Diadorus of Sicily fifty years before Jesus Christ was in some ways the Pantheon of Arabia. But this infirm little cube of masonry in the middle of the large Meccan square, many times injured by the winter floods, was decorated within by frescoes and surrounded without by a great number of idols, statues or, more accurately, unpolished stones, and column-altars—three hundred and sixty, they say, to correspond to the days of the lunar year and symbolize astronomical worship. The temple was covered with a huge brocade renewed every year on the day of 'Ashura (10th of Moharram, the first month). An iron door decorated with gold plates had been melted down along with the swords and the golden gazelle discovered by 'Abdelmottalib when he cleaned and re-excavated the wells of Zemzen.

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In the temple was a particularly respected image of the god Hobal, which a Khoza'i prince had brought from the Amalekites in the third century and placed in the Ka'ba. It was of cornelian and represented a bearded old man with a golden hand, dressed in many-coloured stuffs saturated with saffron and herbs. Before Hobal the people consulted their fate by means of seven darts consecrated to him, each bearing an inscription : "Yes," "no," "price of blood," "stranger," "water," etc. Anyone wanting to decide about a marriage, to dig a well, or pay an indemnity for a murder, went to pray before the idol. A priest mixed the darts and the person drew one by chance. Under the statue was a vault for the safe-keeping of offerings and the blood of victims.

They even say that the effigies of Jesus and Mary were painted on a column in the Ka'ba. Each tribe had a special and portable fetish under a tent-tabernacle (the *qubba*) which it carried to battle surrounded by young Bedouin women singing. Some of the tribes also had a local idol and sometimes a temple, as, for instance, the sanctuaries of Dhulkholosa of the Banu Khath'am in Yemen ; of Roda, the idol of the Banu Rabi'a ben Ka'b in Nejd ; of Dhulka'bât, idol of the Banu Wa'il at Sendâd in Irak ; of the well-known goddesses El Lât and El 'Ozza of the Banu Thaqif at Taïf and the Qoraishites at Nakhla, respectively ; of Manât at Qodaïd between Mecca and Medina.

But the Ka'ba was the common temple for the greater part of the peninsula and the only one to which pilgrimages were made ; the *Bait Allah*, the House of Almighty God and the Pantheon of the lesser divinities.

The fetish particular to Mecca was the famous

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Black Stone—perhaps a meteor and a kind of pumice-stone, for they say it floated in water—thought to be the only object from paradise on earth, brought to Ishmaël by the Archangel Gabriel and blackened by men's sins.

They had framed it in an angle of the building at the height of a man, for originally the Ka'ba was really only a reliquary for this Black Stone. It was piously kissed or touched by the hand when the seven processional rounds (the *tawāf*) of the temple were made.

One night a thief broke very easily into this tiny temple scarcely higher than a man and stole the treasure from the vault watched over by Hobal ; consequently it was thought necessary to build the temple higher and furnish it with a strong roof. An occasion presented itself, for a Byzantine ship—many of them came through the canal the Pharaohs dug centuries before de Lesseps to cross the isthmus and the delta—ran aground on the Arabian coast at Jeddah. Its timber was excellent for framework and moreover, at Mecca lived an excellent Coptic carpenter.

After watching the omens and hesitating for long to touch the temple, the people of Mecca decided to demolish it.

The work of reconstruction was divided amongst the various Qoraishite tribes. When the walls were finished the question arose of the placing of the Black Stone. Who should have this honour ? For five days, they rigorously discussed this serious question which necessarily caused the worst domestic disputes. Each tribe wanted to take charge of it and not one would give up the task to the other.

Having decided to throw obstacles in the way of any clan powerful enough to monopolize this honour,

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the Banu 'Abdeddar and the Banu 'Adi formed an alliance until death by uttering a dreadful oath and plunging their arms up to the elbow in a vessel of blood. Would a civil war be the outcome ?

At last an old man advised them to choose as arbitrator the first person who stepped into the Mesjid square by such and such a gate. This they accepted and awaited the decision of fate.

A man, still young, of full strength, with stately but unaffected bearing, thoughtful but not listless, with open, serious face framed in its black beard, soon arrived at the place where all eyes were turned.

"It is the *amîn*," they cried. "It is Abulqasim, son of 'Abdallah the Hashimite ! He will give the casting vote."

Mahomet had them bring him a large cloak and placing it under the Black Stone, arranged that the representative of each different branch of Qoraish, Zam'a, Abu Hoddaïfa, Qaïs ben 'Adi and 'Otba of the Banu 'Abdelmanaf, should hold an edge of the cloak and lift the stone to its proper height. Then he, himself, took the sacred stone and put it into place in the north angle of the temple, to the satisfaction of all.

Mahomet had several daughters by Khadija : Zaïnab, Roqaïa, Omm Kulthum, and the well-known Fâtima (the only child of the Prophet who had descendants), and possibly a son, Qasim. Mahomet was called Abulqasim, "the father of Qasim" ; but we must add that this prenomen (or *kunya*) may be given independently of any fatherhood and that we know of many children in their nurses' arms named Abu this or Abu that . . . In any case, this son and three others mentioned by tradition, left no traces. If they existed, they died in the cradle.

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It is not astonishing, therefore, that Mahomet thought of adopting a son. Khadija's nephew, having gone into Syria with a caravan, returned with a certain number of slaves. This commerce of men, African negroes or war captives from Arabia, was one of the most lucrative trades, and the noble Qoraishites did not disdain to practise it.

Amongst the slaves in question was a young man named Zaid ben Haritha of the Banu Kalb, who fell into servitude during a raid (*razzia*). Mahomet saw this handsome Adonis for sale and was captivated. He begged his wife to buy him from the nephew, which Khadija gladly did. Mahomet soon afterwards freed him.

The young man's father, having heard that he was at Mecca, went there one day and offered to pay Mahomet his ransom.

"If he wants to go, he shall go without ransom," said Mahomet, "but if he prefers to remain with me as son and friend, why should I not keep him?"

Zaid, who was attached to his master, chose to remain. Mahomet adopted him publicly, and possessed in him the most devoted of disciples and friends.

The Hashimites, as we have said, had not been greatly favoured by fortune. Of all 'Abdelmottalib's sons, the richest was 'Abbas, the merchant and usurer; but he was also extremely miserly. A year of famine occurred after a prolonged drought, and Abu Tâlib, with his many children, was in want. His nephew, Mahomet, comfortably off since his marriage, proposed to 'Abbas, they say, to come to the aid of this father of a family.

So they went to see Abu Tâlib and each one offered to take one of his sons to rear.

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“ Provided you leave me my most intelligent son, ‘Aqil, I gladly consent ; do as you like with the others,” replied Abu Tâlib, in a manner far from flattering to ‘Ali and Ja‘far who, if the anecdote is correct, were brought up by Mahomet and ‘Abbas respectively from that time on.

Mahomet’s house was a model of conjugal happiness and domestic virtue ; Khadija made an ideal wife for Mahomet, who was the best of husbands. This man, in whom the passions developed so strongly later, and who at about sixty provided himself with at least a dozen wives, remained faithful to one wife much older than himself for a quarter of a century. Khadija was all women to him at once—wife, mistress, mother, friend, confidant and comforter. Mahomet’s youth had been chaste. They only mention two occasions, at the time that he was tending the herds on the hills near Mecca, when he set off to the town to satisfy his youthful needs in the obliging establishments on the outskirts. Like a young rustic, he started off to have a pleasant time, but twice an unforeseen event stopped him.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MISSION

*I do not know how to read.*

FOR some time Mahomet had rather neglected his business, not attending to his caravans and trade as carefully as before. His wife's income stopped increasing with regularity; but since he was freed from the necessity of earning his daily bread, he considered her fortune rather as a means than an end in itself and set about to gratify his personal ambitions. He began to practise *tahannuts*,<sup>1</sup> emulating certain ascetics and Christian hermits of the desert.

During the month of Ramadan, especially, he retired from the town to a cave on Mt. Hira, where he had provisions brought him from time to time and passed long days in reflection and prayer. Like all intensely strong-minded and serious persons he found solitude essential; even after he became a chief of the State, absorbed in politics and war, he still resorted to this method of renewing his strength, balance and wisdom, and insisted that these moments of isolation be respected as a necessity to his inspiration. The Koran ordered the faithful not to enter the Prophet's house without permission nor to remain in his company for an unreasonable time. This leader of men understood the satiety of men, their useless troubles, their paltry and ungodly struggles.

<sup>1</sup> Ascetic prayers.

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"Almost the best lot for a true believer," he said, "is to pasture a flock of sheep on the mountain peaks, thus escaping with his faith far from the world's cares."

We like to imagine Mahomet amongst the rough, arid gorges of Mt. Hira, stretched out on a rock overlooking the plain with the town below suspended between the ravines of Mt. Abi Qubaïs. Evening falls. The half-naked shepherds gather their sheep together in the golden dust. The atmosphere is so clear and quiet that their cries and the sound of their staffs on the stones can be heard from afar. The slopes become an almost reddish yellow as if burning with the last rays of the setting sun, showing up distinctly the similar tone of the bushes, with spiny leaves bristling in constant defence and determination to live.

The first stars come out. How many times have these same stars been contemplated from the terraces of Mecca or the threshold of some tent pitched beside a well? How many times has man wondered at the harmonious and unyielding law directing their course? During summer nights in the desert they are so numerous and so brilliant that we almost believe we can hear their flames crackling like the song of a giant brazier.

Surely there are signs in the heavens for those who can understand them. There are mysteries in the world, and the world is a mystery. But is it enough to open our eyes to see and to lend our ears to hear? That is, to see truly? And to hear what ineffable words? But man has eyes which do not see and ears which do not hear. It seems to him, however, that he does hear something. Does he really need more than a pure heart and a sincere and receptive spirit to catch the voice that comes from beyond the stars?

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Soon he will call these stars to witness, and this vault of night, and this moon with modest lustre as potent as the glimmer of truth ; for her strange phases are a rhythmic dance : from a pale silver thread, than a slender crescent, she waxes resplendent, full.

(I swear) :

*By the star, when it setteth. . . .*

*By the heaven, and that which appeareth by night :*

*But what shall cause thee to understand what that which appeareth by night is ?*

*It is the star of piercing brightness. . . .*

(I swear) :

*By the heaven adorned with signs. . . .<sup>1</sup>*

Will these stars not fall one day ?

And this moon—will it not be cloven asunder : the sky fold up like a cloak ? Will the earth not cast up the wicked and paltry at last ? Will the sun not lose its brilliance and the constellations be one day scattered ? Put to flight by a breath from nowhere ? And does not God ask, finally, for his full measure upon earth, as the Christians affirm ?

This immobility of the contemplative Oriental is not a sterile somnolence but a fruitful concentration and method of accumulating energy. By purging the spirit these long musings magnify the intuitive faculties and gather strength not only for the great discoveries of the soul but also for worldly action when it is necessary. The great thinkers have had to be untiring creators. Who can do the most can do the least, and true meditation is action pre-eminently.

Mahomet underwent a crisis ; and sought the explanation in the solitude of the mountains. Did he hear in the great voice of the desert the eternal

<sup>1</sup> Koran, liii, 1 ; lxxxvi, 1-3 ; lxxxv, 1.

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truth springing from the soul of things as he contemplated the starry sky overhead and listened most profoundly to his own soul so wonderfully *ummi*, natural, truthful and free ?

Man's wisdom is doubtful. He can only admit the truth, the indisputable truth ; he can only live in truth. That which he sees about him is not *true*.

The life lived by the Qoraishites was not true. The usurers directing their caravans, the thieving anarchical Bedouins, the unscrupulous adventurers, the untrustworthy dealers in Mecca, had not the true vision of life. They forgot something essential. The idols mounting guard around the Ka'ba were not true. The god Hobal, with his huge beard and motley robes greasy with herbs, was not a true god.

But what is truth ? There is no man worthy of the name who does not ask himself this question—but not as Pilate asked it.

What is truth ?

Nevertheless, when one of the most learned Qoraishites, Zaid ben 'Amr, went to the Ka'ba to pray and touch the ground with his forehead, he leaned against the door of the Temple and reproached his countrymen with their superstitions.

" O God ! " he cried, " if I knew what kind of worship pleased Thee most I would adopt it. But I do not know."

How recognize the true religion ? Was it that of the Jews, so powerful at Yathrib and in the Hijaz Oasis, or that of the Christians—those possessors of a mysterious Book commanding respect ? During his travels Mahomet had esteemed these Christians. Even at Mecca they were most numerous in the outskirts of the town, particularly amongst the slaves from Abyssinia. Could it be that these common people

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possessed a truth unknown to the noble Arabs ? Mahomet was attracted by this religion but knew little about it ; and it was not these ignorant people usually contending among themselves who could instruct him in it. He needed direct inspiration.

Zaid was a poet and scholar. He confided in God alone and not in the *jinns*. In his verses he praised one God, the creator of heaven and earth. He was not so mad, he said, as to believe in El Lât and El 'Ozza, the stupid divinities of stupid men. Such superstitions must disappear in the light of reason, as the phantoms of night and the chimeras of darkness vanish in the daylight.

Mahomet met Zaid ben 'Amr one day in the neighbourhood of Mecca and asked him to share his meal with him. But the meat served was that of animals sacrificed to the idols and Zaid refused to eat it.

"I only eat the meat of beasts slaughtered when calling upon Allah's name," he said.

Mahomet, who probably practised the ordinary ritual, was struck by the old man's attitude, and his doubts were increased by his association with Zaid's disciples and other friends.

At a fête given in the valley of Nakhla to honour the goddess El 'Ozza, all the tribes of Mecca were represented, and Mahomet sacrificed a white ewe. Zaid ben 'Amr, 'Othman ben el Huwaîrith, 'Obaïdallah ben Jahsh and Waraqa ben Nawfal (these last two were Mahomet's cousins) also came, but formed a separate group.

"Our countrymen are wrong," they said, "to commune with a false deity who can do nothing either good or evil. Shall we also gather round an insensible stone that neither sees nor hears and only drips with the blood of its victims ? Let us find a better faith

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than that. We will go to foreign lands and look for the truth."

Zaid wanted to go to Syria, the Christian country. His wife and his uncle, El Khattâb, young 'Omar's father, made an effort to prevent him from going there by pretending that Zaid was a madman and prompting the street-urchins to make game of him. In the end, however, he managed to get away and wandered throughout Palestine and Mesopotamia, talking with rabbis and monks, but died on the way home without having seen Mahomet proclaimed Prophet. Mahomet prayed for his soul and looked upon him as a forerunner. Waraqâ and Omâyya ben Abî's-Salt wrote his elegy in verse.

As a result, 'Obâïdallah was converted to Islam ; after going to Abyssinia, he became a Christian and died there. Later, it behoved Mahomet to marry his widow, Omm Habîba, Abu Sofyan's daughter.

'Othman ben el Huwaîrith went to Byzantium, where he was baptized. He, it seemed, was more ambitious and less mystic than his three friends, and tried to establish a Greek protectorate over Mecca and to reign as a vassal-king under Cæsar. The Qoraishites drove him out shamefully ; he found shelter with the Ghassanides, but later was poisoned by them.

And last of all, Waraqâ ben Nawfal, Khadija's cousin, already a Christian and a student of the Scriptures, made an Arab translation of several fragments of the Gospels, they say, and lived as an intimate in Mahomet's circle.

About the year 610, the inner crisis that took possession of Mahomet was at its height. The idea that something was lacking to himself and his people was intolerable to him. The only essential thing had been forgotten. They were attached to the fetishes

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or the idols of their tribe or clan ; were afraid of *jinns*, ogres and spirits. They neglected the supreme reality (though not denying it, perhaps), and this negligence was the death of their souls. Mahomet freed himself from all collateral ideas, detached himself from all forces depending on other forces, from all beings who were only a reflection of the One Being. He knew now, through the Christians of Syria and Mecca, that there was but one revealed religion and that the few people who had received divine orders were the possessors of the truth ! Inspired men had told them about heaven. Each time that men went astray, heaven sent a Prophet to show them the right path and to remind them of the inalterable truth. This religion of the Prophets of all time was one and the same religion and whenever men distorted it a messenger was sent from heaven to set them right. The Arabs of that day had lost their way completely. Was it not essential that divine mercy reveal itself again to them with its special aid ?

Mahomet gave up men's companionship more and more. In the solitudes of Mt. Hira he found greater and greater satisfaction. Spending whole weeks at a time there with a few scanty provisions, his spirit gloried in fasting, in vigils, and in the search for a defined idea. He hardly knew whether it was day or night, whether he dreamed or watched. For hours at a time he remained kneeling in the darkness or lying in the sun, or he strode with long steps on the stony tracks. When he walked, it seemed as if voices came out of the rocks ; when he struck a stone, it answered him. And the stones everywhere under that fiery sun seemed to greet him as " God's Apostle " . . .

On his return the good Khadija was troubled to see him so silently elated. Sometimes he appeared to lose

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all consciousness of what was going on around him and lay inert on the ground, his breathing hardly perceptible. Then he would sleep, his breast rising and falling regularly with peaceful slumber. But his respiration would grow more rapid ; he would pant ; dream ; an enormous human being as huge as the heavens over the earth and covering the whole horizon would then approach, rush towards him with extended arms ready to seize him. . . . Mahomet would wake with a start, his body covered with sweat ; Khadija would wipe his forehead and question him gently but anxiously in a voice she tried to calm. He would remain silent, or evade her questions, or he would answer in words she did not understand.

At the end of six months Mahomet's body suffered ; he grew thin, his step became jerky, his hair and beard unkempt, his eyes strange. He felt hopeless. Had he become one of those madmen such as he had often met—a pathetic demoniac, a hideous plaything of the powers of darkness ? Was he one of those poets inspired by a *jinn*—for measured phrases often burst unconsciously from his tongue. He felt hopeless ; for he had a horror of poets, playthings of every wind, who said what they did not do.

“ I am afraid of becoming mad,” he decided to say one day to the gentle Khadija, when he could no longer bear the weight. “ I see all the signs of madness in myself. Who would have believed that I would become a poet, or possessed by a *jinn* ? I ! By no chance speak of it to anyone.”

Khadija wished for his confidence. She hoped and she doubted ; but when she was so worried herself, how could she reassure him ? But she was a woman made to give consolation and comfort ; she possessed the tender firmness of a virtuous wife and

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a devoted mother and gave this man, younger than herself, the fullest love. In her devotion she was almost subconsciously pleased to find this strong man, her admired husband, weak and ill. How could she help reassuring him ?

“ O Abulqasim, are you not the *amîn*—for so you are called—the sincere, the trustworthy, the truthful man ? How can God allow you to be deceived when you do not deceive ? Are you not a pious, sober, charitable, hospitable man ? Have you not respected your parents, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, helped the traveller, protected the weak ? It is not possible that you are the plaything of lying demons and malicious *jinns*.”

“ What, then, is this being who seeks me out again and again ? What is this being who has not told me his name and from whom I cannot escape ? ” Mahomet was again seized with anguish. He trembled, his face grew red and then pale ; his ears hummed, his eyes dilated. A strange presence had intruded itself.

“ There he is ! It is *he* ! He is coming . . . ”

And yet he was awake and neither asleep nor dreaming ; and the strange being was approaching. He was there.

Khadija had an inspiration :

“ Come to me,” she said to her husband. “ Get under my cloak.” Mahomet did so. He was like a child on his mother’s breast, hunting protection from all the world’s dangers. Khadija covered him with her veil, let down her hair ; she seated him on her knees, embraced him closely and hid him against her flesh under her clothing and her dark hair.

“ Well ? ” she asked, “ Is he still there ? ”

“ I do not see nor feel him any more. He is gone.”

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"Then he is not a lewd *jinn*, nor yet a demon ; for he respects women's chastity. It can only be an angel of God."

Ramadan came. Mahomet increased his solitary watches in the passes of Mt. Hira. Days passed ; the crescent moon grew round, resplendent, then waxed thinner and thinner again. One night Mahomet was asleep in a cave. Suddenly the mysterious being who had visited him before appeared, holding a piece of silk in his hand covered with writing.

"*Iqra'*," said he to Mahomet : "Read."<sup>1</sup>

"I do not know how to read."

The being threw himself upon him, cast the silk around his neck tight enough to almost stifle him. But letting it go, he said :

"Read."

"I do not know how to read."

The being again threw himself upon Mahomet to stifle him.

"Read," he repeated for the third time.

"What shall I read ?"

"Read," said the being, letting him go.

*Read, in the name of thy Lord, who hath created all things ;  
Who hath created man of congealed blood.*

*Read, by thy most beneficent Lord who taught the use of the pen ;  
Who teacheth man that which he knoweth not.*

(Koran, xcvi, 1-5.)

Mahomet repeated these words and felt his spirit suddenly illuminated. The silk covered with signs was before him. Though illiterate he understood what was written, and knew intuitively the contents of a book filled with divine secrets.

The angel confirmed what had been the nature of

<sup>1</sup> Or : "Recite" ; referring to the liturgical psalmody of the sacred texts. Or again : "Preach, in the Lord's name. . . ."

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his thoughts during months past : God created man and revealed to him the truth that passes all understanding. " It is He who taught the use of the pen , who revealeth to man that which he knoweth not." The miracle of the revelation and mystery of the written word—so impressive to the illiterate and all the more persuasive if it refers to a divine subject. At last the Arabs, like the Jews and Christians, were about to have a sacred text to recite liturgically, and a supernatural law to guide them in the path of salvation.

The mysterious being was gone. Mahomet awoke with the feeling that a book had been written in his heart. He came out from the grotto much disturbed and ran the full length of the dark tracks, knocking his feet against the stones, and reached the top of the mountain. And there he heard a celestial voice assuring him that he was the Messenger of Allah.

Mahomet lifted up his eyes and saw at the horizon the Archangel in human form, shining with resplendence, yet veiled at the same time by the light. Overpowered, he turned away his face, but saw the same vision again. Once more he turned, but from every side and at each moment he perceived the radiant and motionless angel. He saw nothing but the angel. The angel was everywhere, sitting straight and calm upon a throne of fire, and looking fixedly, silently, at him.

Terrified and dizzy, his soul disturbed, Mahomet prostrated himself on the ground, hiding his head in his hands, rigid, unconscious of the outside world. . . .

Khadija was troubled at the non-appearance of her husband for he had left a long time ago with very few provisions. At daylight she sent one of her slaves to look for him, but he found no one in the grotto and called his master's name in vain, only to hear it

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echoed from the mountain. Her anxiety increased. At last, when the day was already advanced, she saw her husband enter quite exhausted, with haggard look and disordered dress. Without speaking Mahomet went to Khadija and fell at her feet. He put his head in her lap and allowed her to stroke his hair, like a dejected child.

“ O Abulqasim, where have you come from ? ” she said. “ I sent them to the mountain but they did not find you.”

Mahomet told her everything that had happened, mentioning his terror, his agony, his pious ardour, and his doubts.

“ By him who holds Khadija’s life between his hands,” she cried, “ I hope that you will become the Prophet of these people. No, God will not allow you to be deceived. Are you not a genuine and truthful man, a holy and charitable one ? You are the friend of your kindred, the supporter of the weak ; you give to those who have nothing and shelter travellers. No, God will not deceive you.”

Mahomet was seized with terror again and began to shiver.

“ Cover me,” he cried, “ cover me. Wrap me up. Hide me.”

Khadija took her woollen cloak and threw it over her husband, covering him completely, hiding his head and his eyes under the stuff. Then she rocked him like a mother, laid him gently on the bed, and he slept.

Leaving her husband sleeping, though only half reassured herself, Khadija went to consult her cousin, the learned Waraqa. This old sage, a student of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, knew how to recognize truth and to throw light upon it under exceptional circumstances. Khadija admired her

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husband blindly and believed in him ; but really, all these things were so very strange. . . .

“ By him who holds Waraqa’s life between his hands,” cried the old man, when Khadija had told him everything, “ if you speak the truth, Mahomet will be the Prophet of this nation, for he is, without doubt, the expected Messenger. The angel he saw was the great *Namus*, God’s confidant, whom He once sent to Moses, ‘Imran’s son. He is the holy messenger who inspires Prophets. But what, then, did he tell your husband ? Did he order him to preach ; did he entrust him with a definite message ? Did he command him to call mankind to God ? I am anxious to know. For in that case I will be the first to believe in Mahomet’s mission and to come over to his religion. Go, seek out your husband ; calm his fears and banish your own.”

Khadija went home. Mahomet was still sleeping. She looked at him for a long time lovingly and earnestly. He slept peacefully. But suddenly she saw him move ; his forehead grew moist, he breathed laboriously, then rose to his feet. The angel had returned.

“ Rise,” said he.

“ I have risen,” said Mahomet. “ What shall I do ? ”

*O thou covered,  
Arise and preach,  
And magnify thy Lord.  
And cleanse thy garments :  
And fly every abomination :  
And be not liberal, in hopes to receive more in return :  
And patiently wait for thy Lord.*

Koran, lxxiv.

“ O Abulqasim, lie down on your couch,” said

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Khadija tenderly, "you must rest. Why do you not sleep?"

"Sleep and rest are not made for me," said Mahomet, seriously. "Gabriel reappeared and commanded me to call mankind to God, and to pursue prayer. But who can I call, and who will believe me?" And he bowed his head, dejected.

"You can at least call me before all others, for I believe in you," said Khadija, irresistibly impelled.

A short time afterwards Mahomet, who had gone to the Ka'ba, met Waraqa making the round. The blind, old man interrogated him on what his cousin had told him, and made Mahomet describe the wonderful vision in detail.

"By him who holds my life between his hands," he cried, when Mahomet had finished, "you will be Prophet of this nation. The great *Namus*, who came to Moses with the laws, has appeared to you. Why am I not younger? I would help and support you through the midst of afflictions that you will have to undergo. I would defend you against your own people; I would share your sorrows."

"What are you saying?"

"Yes, no man has undergone what you have undergone without being persecuted! You will be combatted harshly, you will be treated as madman and impostor, you will be driven out. . . . Ah! If I were younger and able-bodied, if I were alive at this hour . . ."

And, taking Mahomet's head between his trembling hands, he kissed his forehead, giving great consolation and great peace to this tormented man.

The Prophet really needed all his strength for he had himself to fight against before he could fight against other men. But the revelation was

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interrupted, the angel had not reappeared and Mahomet did not know what to think. Was he the victim of an hallucination? He almost hoped so; for his nature revolted against the super-human burden and the awe-inspiring grace of this mission. Nevertheless, the silence of heaven was unbearable to him. He could not live in this uncertainty, so he returned to Mt. Hira, to the spot where the vision had appeared, in the hope of again seeing it. Nothing came. No word resounded deep in his heart; he found only intolerable solitude there and terrible silence. His soul was empty after having known inexpressible fullness—a state of longing painful to utter, the “dark night” of the soul.

Mahomet roamed on the hills. Could anyone have seen him they would have taken him for mad, walking at random for whole hours on the steepest slopes, on the edges of precipices, flying from men and flying from himself, in search of God whose absence he could no longer endure. Nothing came. How tolerate life when it had become empty of all it had brought him besides itself? How endure this doubt of his most profound self? To merely exist, think, feel, know himself to be living in this agony and in this solitude was more of a punishment than human strength could bear. The precipice yawning beneath those boulders—Oh! to leap into it, destroy himself, be lost in its gulf! Mahomet longed for death. He went towards the declivity and touched the edge with his foot; a stone loosened, fell, rebounded from the rock; all was over . . . But at the moment when this desperate man was about to throw himself over, he heard a voice :

“Mahomet, you are God’s true Prophet.” The angel led him away from the precipice, and Mahomet

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descended the mountain and went home. Khadija pacified and consoled him. Several times he was on the point of killing himself in this way but the angel always appeared and repeated :

“ Mahomet, you are God’s true Prophet.”

The revelation was not repeated.

At last one day when the Prophet was waiting and grieving, begging for a sign and complaining sadly of this divine neglect, Gabriel brought him consolation :

(I swear) :

*By the brightness of the morning ;*

*And by the night when it groweth dark :*

*Thy Lord hath not forsaken thee, neither doth he hate thee.*

*Verily the life to come shall be better for thee than this present life :*

*And thy Lord shall give thee a reward wherewith thou shalt be well pleased.*

*Did he not find thee an orphan, and hath he not taken care of thee ?*

*And did he not find thee wandering in error, and hath he not guided thee into the truth ?*

*And did he not find thee needy, and hath he not enriched thee ?*

*Wherefore oppress not the orphan ; neither repulse the beggar :*

*But declare the goodness of thy Lord.*

Koran, xciii.

What bliss for this man who could not live in uncertainty ! It was not the deep, lovely sweetness of this consolation which comforted him the most, but the security, the certain duty, and the definite command to disclose ineffable gifts. Ah ! Yes, by all means, to pass them on ! Why not tell everyone at once ? He must tell them at least to those he could count on. Denials and scorn were nothing compared to doubt of himself.

The angel had directed him to worship and pray, had instructed him in the rites. Before praising God

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he must be pure. The body must be cleansed of all its stains, and each time, also, before the faithful prayed, he must carry out the ritual ablutions, pouring water over his face, hands arms up to the elbows, and his feet. Then he must stand upright, with his face towards the Lord, proclaiming : “ *Allahu akbar* God is greatest ” ; and reciting a portion of the Koran, bow with the hands on the knees repeating that God alone is great ; then he must rise before sinking down to the earth again with forehead in the dust, sit up, bow down again, and then stand up to recommence the same movements before seating himself once more to utter the great testimonial : “ There is no divinity but God and Mahomet is his Messenger ”, calling as witness the truth of divine promises of the Resurrection, the Judgment, paradise, hell and the prophetic mission.

Khadija, also, prayed according to these rites but as yet no one knew it. One day the young ‘Ali came into their room unexpectedly and found them bowing down and reciting unknown and harmonious words.

“ What are you doing ? ” asked the astonished child, “ and before whom are you bowing down ? ”

“ Before God,” replied Mahomet, “ before God, whose Prophet I am and who commands me to call men unto him. O, son of my uncle, you also, come unto the one God. I desire you to worship the one God without a peer, and adopt the true religion chosen by him. I request you to deny idols like El Lât and El ‘Ozza who can neither harm nor help their worshippers. Say with me :

*God is one. . . .*

*And there is not anyone like unto him. . . .*

*Neither slumber nor sleep seizeth him;*

*To him belongeth whatsoever is in heaven, and on earth.*

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“Never have I heard such words,” said ‘Ali when he had finished. Their charm and beauty bewitched him ; their strangeness dismayed him.

“I must consult my father,” he said. This proceeding did not please Mahomet very much, and he asked his young cousin either to do nothing or else to speak with great secrecy to Abu Tâlib, and only to him.

The child passed a very troubled night and the next morning announced to Mahomet and Khadija his strong desire to follow them.

“God made me,” said he, “without consulting Abu Tâlib. Must I consult him, then, before adoring God ?”

And so ‘Ali, converted in his childhood, never worshipped the idols ; they called him : “Him whose face was never sullied,” because he never bowed down before anyone but God.

Zaid ben Haritha, the emancipated slave and adopted son of Mahomet, was also converted to Islam, and soon influenced the future Caliph Abu Bakr, who became a faithful adherent of Khadija’s husband.

The latter was of modest birth (his father Abu Qohafa having been fly-chaser to the rich ‘Abdallah ben Jodh‘an, like him also a Taïmite) ; he had become rather well off and even rich through trading. This man, comparatively small and delicate, but handsome, affable, eloquent and sensitive, had the greatest gift of charm. Abu Bakr had a profound influence in Mecca ; for he possessed a fund of anecdotes, an ability to interpret dreams, and was instructed in genealogy—great importance was attached to this knowledge, just as in all circles with conservative ideas, as M. Marcel Proust says. He was often consulted as to his decision on a murder trial, or to settle

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blood-money. He was impressionable but firm on occasion. Often moved to tears—they said he could never hear the verses of the Koran chanted without weeping—conciliatory and moderate, he knew how, when he took charge of a difficult situation, to solve problems unhesitatingly ; but he could also be inflexible. Already Mahomet's friend, he became his intimate as well as his disciple, and saw him every day.

His adhesion to Islam was useful, as he converted many Qoraishites : the Ommaïade 'Othman ben 'Affan, 'Abderrahnan ben 'Awf, Talha ben 'Obaïdallah, Sa'd ben Abi Waqqas, and Zubaïr ben 'Awwam, his son-in-law, the husband of his daughter, Asma. Abu Bakr, however, did not succeed in converting the other members of his family : his father, his children (especially his oldest son), his brothers, his sisters remained pagan until the capture of Mecca and strongly disapproved of his attitude.

The sermons of Islam were kept secret for three years during which Mahomet was known as the inspired Prophet, and not yet as the Messenger of Allah with a definite religious mission.

His religious conceptions became more precise. He lived the life of a zealous ascetic. Following the command transmitted through the angel, he passed the greater part of the night in prayer, chanting the revealed verses which he portioned out ; for, "at the beginning of the night the spirit is stronger and its message has more significance." His adherents imitated him.

For Mahomet an inner life existed. Undoubtedly he was neither a saint nor a mystic like Saint Theresa or Hallaj, but he was a man for whom hidden things had more meaning than apparent ones , for him the

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invisible surpassed the visible, the spiritual aspect was the more important, and in one sense, the only actually existent aspect. He grasped the profound reality and proclaimed his discovery to mankind. Freed from all sham culture, falsehood and vanity, he took his stand once and for all on solid ground. An absolute realist, he succeeded in practical life when he was forced to take his place in the everyday world. The great mystics have always been like this. For, the visible is the "dial-plate"<sup>1</sup> of the invisible, the "roots" of the true plant; "what is below is like what is on high"<sup>2</sup>; "look first for the Kingdom of God and his justice and all the rest will be given you also."

<sup>1</sup> Emerson.

<sup>2</sup> Hermes Trismegisters.

## CHAPTER VI THE PERSECUTIONS

*. . . For we will lay on thee a weighty word.*

Koran, lxxiii, 4.

And God said unto Moses “*I am that I am*” : and he said : “ Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, *I am* hath sent me unto you.”

Exodus, iii, 14.

THREE years after the first revelation Mahomet received the command to preach publicly ; *Preach to those near at hand*, the angel told him, and said also :

*O Apostle, publish the whole of that which hath been sent down unto thee from thy Lord : for if thou do not, thou dost not in effect publish any part thereof. . . . Wherefore publish that which thou hast been commanded, and withdraw from the idolaters.*

Koran, v, 71, and xv, 94.

The Prophet was greatly troubled and hesitated without knowing how to begin. He had had but little success with his own family. Gabriel repeated the command and threatened him ; Mahomet conquered his timidity and obeyed. He had, they say, a sheep cooked and prepared with milk and sent ‘Ali to invite the family of ‘Abdelmottalib, his uncles, Abu Tâlib, Hamza, El ‘Abbas, Abu Lahab and forty other persons, all Hashimites. When they had finished eating Mahomet stood up and tried to speak, but Abu Lahab interrupted him and spoke first ; the

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guests retired before the unfortunate Prophet could deliver a word of what he had to say . . .

But the next day Mahomet went to the expense of preparing another meal for Hashim's descendants and on this occasion he spoke resolutely :

" Children of 'Abdelmottalib, God has commanded me to call you unto him. Never before has an Arab bestowed upon his people what I now bring you. I bring you blessings from both this world and the other. Who amongst you will aid me in my undertaking ? Who will act as my brother and helper ? "

An icy silence followed. Had this man's madness become permanent ? Was he trying to drag all his kin into this extraordinary enterprise ? They consulted together but no one replied, and when Abu Tâlib spoke indulgently, Abu Lahab shrugged his shoulders and shut his mouth.

But suddenly, 'Ali, in youthful enthusiasm, rushed to his cousin and cried :

" I will help you, Prophet of God ! I will break the heads and rend the limbs of those who go against you ! "

Mahomet put his hand on 'Ali's youthful shoulders and said :

" Good ! So this then is my brother and helper ! "

The company smiled, then broke into laughter and addressed Abu Tâlib, pointing to his son, a youngster with sore eyes, and swollen belly supported on thin legs.

" Very fine ! So this is the deputy of God's Messenger ! Good ! Now, venerable Abu Tâlib, you will be obliged to obey your own son ! "

" Preach to your own people," the angel had said, " Publish that which thou hast been commanded, and withdraw from the idolaters." So after this unfruitful effort on his relatives' behalf, the Prophet publicly

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and officially addressed his entire tribe out of doors. He hurried one morning to the Hill of Safa and gave the ancient war-cry of the Qoraishites :

“ Heu ! Behold the morning ! Banu Fihr ! Banu ‘Adi ! Banu Makhzum ! . . .

When the crowd had gathered as if assembled for the attack of an enemy or the departure of an expedition, and each representative had either come himself or sent someone in his place, Mahomet cried out :

“ If I told you that horsemen were in the valley ready to attack you, would you believe me ? ”

“ Yes,” they answered, “ we have never heard you lie.”

“ Well ! I now tell you important news. O Banu ‘Abdelmanaf, O Banu Taïm, O Banu Makhzum, O Banu Asad . . . O assembled Qoraishites, redeem your own souls, for I can do nothing for you in God’s presence . . . Listen to what he commanded me to tell you . . . ”

Abu Lahab then rose and cried :

“ May you be cursed for the rest of your life ! Why gather us together for trifles like this ? ”

Mahomet, disconcerted, looked at his uncle without speaking. His face grew red and then pale ; his eyes twitched ; he could not breathe ; he foamed a little at the mouth. Holding out his hand towards his assailant, he spoke, but it was really the angel of wrath speaking for him :

*The hands of Abu Lahab shall perish, and he shall perish ;  
His riches shall not profit him, neither that which he hath gained,  
He shall go down to be burned into flaming fire. . . .*

Koran, cxi.

Abu Lahab was a stout, choleric man. He had married Omm Jamil bint Harb ben Omayya, Abu

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Sofyan's sister, and had wedded his son to Roqaïa, Mahomet's daughter. His wife detested the latter and incited her husband against the Prophet. He forced his son to divorce Roqaïa, who re-married 'Othman, one of the handsomest men in Mecca in spite of smallpox scars. Abu Sofyan became one of the most determined, if not the most violent, adversaries of the Prophet, although he had more subtlety than the brutal Abu Lahab. He avoided coarse insults and when war was declared between the Qoraishites and the Mahometan refugees at Medina, he came forward as the determined, intelligent, dreaded chief of the aristocratic and plutocratic party of Mecca. He had married 'Otba's beautiful daughter Hind, so well-known for her amorous adventures.

In spite of all, Mahomet converted many people, mostly among the poor, the weak, the women and the slaves, as the first Christians had done. He preached with success in the sordid outskirts of Mecca. The simple and the oppressed received his words better than the wealthy, arrogant patricians of Bat'ha—those conservatives born with established organizations and beliefs, such as they were.

Without looking on him as a social reformer, they were struck by the energy with which he attacked the sceptical rich and the mocking Pharisees, especially in the beginning, and declared that this world's goods imperil the spiritual life. Woe to those who refuse to give alms, says the Koran ; woe to those who hoard and imagine that treasure will bring them eternal life . . . .

*The emulous desire of multiplying riches employeth you  
Until ye visit the graves. . . .  
Hereafter shall ye know your folly.  
Again, hereafter shall ye know your folly. . . .*

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*Verily ye shall see hell;*

*Ye shall surely see it with the eye of certainty.*

*Then shall ye be examined . . . concerning the pleasures with which  
ye have amused yourselves in this life.*

Koran, cii.

The aristocracy remained hostile. The Koran states that in each city there are lords who resist the truth. It was these who persuaded the people against him.

The Mussulmans did not dare to pray, according to their rites, in the Ka'ba in the centre of the town, but met for that purpose on the neighbouring hills, in the rugged setting of brown rocks and burnt earth. Often their meetings were disturbed or broken up by stone-throwers. One day the infidels were behaving in this manner and injured Sa'd ben Abi Waqqas, a believer, who seized the jaw-bone of a deserted camel's carcase and beat his adversary. These were the first blows to be exchanged for Islam.

Most of all, they tried to overthrow Mahomet by mockery. When he started to speak they drowned him out with ribald songs or discordant cries. They sniggered when he passed by in the street and encouraged the children to play ring around him.

'Amr, the young and handsome poet, belaboured the Prophet and his religion in epigrams and satires even more sharp and dangerous than the worst persecutions. 'Amr was a love-child. His mother lived on the outskirts of Mecca, and in the door of her little house was stuck the ensign of a courtesan. When he was born, she assembled all her clients, among whom were Abu Sofyan, Abu Lahab, Omayya ben Khalaf, together with a famous physiognomist.

"You see," she said, "the result of my relations with you. The one picked out as the father of this child may give it the name he wishes."

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The physiognomist attributed the paternity to El 'Asi, the eldest amongst the woman's admirers ; this is how the future conqueror of Egypt came to bear the name of 'Amr ben el 'Asi.

The Prophet was asked to prove his mission. Why could he not perform miracles like Moses and Jesus ? Why could he not change the hills of Safa to gold ? Why not make the Book itself, of which he talked so much, fall down from heaven ? Why not show them this so-called angel who came to speak with him ? Why not make the dead speak ? He should be able to move a mountain !

" You would do well to ask God, with whom you are on such good terms, to loosen the grip of these mountains stifling our town so disastrously," they sniggered. " Or it would be enough to make a beautiful spring, purer than Zemzem, gush forth ; for we really lack water. And as Prophets can foretell the future you might as well advise us about the approaching price of goods. Cannot your God disclose which articles will rise in price ? We should like to know these things in order to regulate our trade and speculate with certainty."

The Koran replied :

*Say : I am able neither to procure advantage unto myself, nor to avert mischief from me, but as God pleaseth. If I knew the secrets of God, I should surely enjoy abundance of good, neither should evil befall me. Verily I am no other than a denouncer of threats, and a messenger of good tidings unto people who believe.*

Koran, vii, 188.

" I am only here to warn you," Mahomet continually repeated. " I have a message to deliver. The message is important and I am delivering it as well as I can. No one performs miracles except with God's permission. The Prophets of old performed miracles

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and their people scoffed at them or put them to death. Even when my words move the mountains, cleave the earth asunder, make the dead speak, you will not believe them any more than you do now if your minds are obdurate. The miracle that I bring you to prove my mission is the Koran, a book revealed to an illiterate man, which neither other men nor geniuses could equal. If you do not listen to me, however, God is my witness. I am only here to warn you."

Mahomet made so bold as to assail the cherished idols of the Arabs by name, sparing neither Hobal, the old man of the Ka'ba, nor his wife Manawat, nor the venerated goddesses El Lât and El 'Ozza. He made mockery of the *ansâb*, those deaf and blind statues incapable either of helping or harming, of small columns of stone or earth mounds which the Arabs sprinkled with blood and destroyed when they hoped to find better ones, of the *jamarats* or heaps of stones around which they walked in circles. He mocked the idols made into cakes which the Banu Hanifa worshipped but ate, if necessary, in times of scarcity. He found fault with oracles and with arrows drawn in lots. He denounced the immorality of the customs, the callousness of the people, the avarice of the bourgeois and the greed of the usurers.

There was a general outcry. The entire social order tottered. All the institutions and vital interests of the city were menaced by this innovator, who perhaps aspired to put himself into power. Also, Arab nationalism revolted against a religion that claimed foreign revelations and traditions. For Mahomet took as witnesses the *People of the Book*, both Jew and Christian, declaring that they were in sympathy with him. Was he about to emulate

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'Othman ben Howaïrith, who had tried to impose Cæsar's protectorship on Mecca with himself as king ?

Several important Qoraishites, Abu Jahl, Abu Sofyan, 'Otba and Shaïba ben Rabi'a, Walid ben Moghîra, etc., sought out Abu Tâlib to ask him to keep his nephew quiet.

Intimidated by their threats, the old man implored Mahomet not to rouse the hatred of so many enemies against him and his family, especially since they were the most influential persons in the city. At the thought that his uncle was forsaking him, Mahomet grew pensive, but he answered :

" O my uncle, even if they set up against me the sun on my right and the moon on my left, I will not abandon my purpose until God grants me success, or until I die."

He withdrew in tears. Abu Tâlib, greatly moved, called him back and said :

" O my brother's son ! By Almighty God, I will not forsake you ! "

Although Abu Tâlib had no leanings towards his nephew's ideas, Arab tradition and sense of clan disposed him to protect Mahomet. With the exception of Abu Lahab, moreover, all the Hashimites, without being converts to Islam, united in fellowship with the threatened Prophet. His murder would have caused a civil war.

In spite of this they could not save him from a thousand insults. Abu Lahab, his wife, the shrewish Omm Jamil, his neighbours, threw refuse in front of Mahomet's door, which he was obliged to remove. They say that Abu Jahl had promised to prevent the Prophet from praying before the Ka'ba. He was a little, squat man with red hair looking as if it had been scorched by the sun ; to the swarthy Arabs he

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was the impersonation of the devil. As Mahomet continued to prostrate himself in prayer, Abu Jahl threw the placenta of a sheep, sacrificed in the sanctuary, at his neck. He endured this outrageous insult, went home and had his daughter wash him.

There were times, however, when a mysterious awe overcame the persecutor.

‘Oqba, it appeared, made allowances for Mahomet ; his friend, Obayy, refused to speak to him one day, reproaching him with believing in this “*sabean*” who passed his time in absurd prayers and ablutions. In order to prove himself undeserving of this reproach and win back the esteem of the Qoraishites, ‘Oqba swore by El Lât and El ‘Ozza that he was not a disciple of Mahomet and forthwith spat in his face. The Prophet calmly wiped his face, and during a trance, following this insult, a verse from the Koran was revealed to him : one day the sinner would repent and ask himself with sorrow why he had not followed in the path of the Prophet.

But the insults he had to bear were nothing compared to the persecutions directed at the poor and unprotected disciples. They were dragged into the houses and beaten ruthlessly. Those serving as slaves were tortured by their masters. A woman, they say, died during her martyrdom. Bilal, the negro, refused to reject Islam ; his master laid him out naked on the ground under a devouring sun, placing a huge stone on his breast and leaving him there half-cooked on the burning rocks and dying of thirst.

“Ahad ! Ahad !” he repeated endlessly, “One God ! One God !”

The compassionate Abu Bakr, seeing him there

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one day in this state, was moved, bought him from his master and freed him. Bilal became one of the Prophet's companions, the first muezzin<sup>1</sup> and the patron of the negroes. Abu Bakr thus bought back many of the misused slaves ; amongst them was a negress whom 'Omar ben el Khattâb, the future caliph, had maltreated. Several people gave way and renounced their beliefs.

These Mussulmans, without a patron, could not hold out any longer.

"If you can endure," they said to the Prophet, "we can endure still more. But give us the right to defend ourselves."

"Wait for God's command," said Mahomet. That night a revelation was sent to him telling him to endure as the resolute prophets before him had endured.

"At least allow us to leave Mecca."

Mahomet advised them to go to Abyssinia, a Christian country ruled by an upright king, the Negus (the *Najashi*), who kindly welcomed monotheists persecuted for their faith.

'Othman and his wife, Roqaïa, Mahomet's daughter, Zubaïr, Abu Bakr's son-in-law, and a dozen men left for Africa to escape their woes and fly to God with their faith. They embarked in Abyssinian ships at the close of the year 614 and were well received by the Negus, who persuaded a certain number of other Mussulmans (about eighty) to join them in this hospitable land.

Abu Bakr also thought of exiling himself there and had already set out, but thanks to the protection of an influential Bedouin sheikh, he was able to stay in Mecca.

<sup>1</sup> Mahometan crier who proclaims the hours of prayer from a minaret.

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Supported by Abu Tâlib and the solidarity of the clan, Mahomet continued to preach, but not without difficulty. One day when he was making the round of the Ka'ba, the onlookers mocked him each time he passed near them. Having finished, he strode up to them and pointed to his breast.

“ Strike me,” he said. “ Sacrifice me as a victim.”

But the people were ashamed and said to him with embarrassment :

“ Go in peace, Abulqasim, go in peace. We know your merits.”

His more relentless enemies blamed them for this weakness and so appealed to their self-conceit that the next day at the same place they in turn fell upon him, crying :

“ It is you who pretend that our fathers were in the wrong ! It is you who call our gods impotent ! ”

“ Yes, it is I who say that.”

The insults turned to blows ; ‘Oqba, who decidedly wanted to excuse himself for his passing lack of zeal, took Mahomet by the throat and fell just short of strangling him. Fortunately Abu Bakr intervened, threw himself into the brawl and succeeded in pulling out the Prophet, not without leaving a portion of his beard behind.

One day the unhappy Prophet went home without having met a single man, a single woman, a single child, a single slave, who did not insult him on his way, treating him as a madman and liar, or insolently resisting his exhortations. Cast down and disgusted, he threw himself on a mat and gave himself up to the saddest thoughts ; but from the depths of his heart and his innermost soul came the inspiring voice. God had sent his angel to comfort the Prophet.

In such moments of despondency and doubt of

## MECCA

the world and himself, the words were more severe and gloomy, reflecting a sort of tragic pessimism ; the rhythm more violent, the rhymes more crepitating.

*Say, I fly for refuge unto the Lord of the daybreak  
That he may deliver me from the mischief of those things which he hath  
created ;  
And from the mischief of the night when it cometh on. . . .  
Say, I fly for refuge unto the Lord of men,  
The king of men,  
The God of men. . . .  
That he may deliver me . . . from genii and men.*

Koran, cxiii and cxiv.

Courageously, Mahomet resumed his work, and when the time came round for the pilgrimages and the large markets, he spoke to Arabs from every corner of the peninsula. He even went to 'Okadh. The Bedouins listened to him, wagged their heads, found that he talked well and went ahead with their business.

The Qoraishites forced themselves to disown his words, refused to believe this ranteer whose own family would have none of him. They met together in the house of the Makhzumite, Walid ben Moghîra, to discuss their plan of action.

"Would you say he is a sorcerer, a *kâhin* ? "

"No, he has not the emphatic tone, the jerky language." "A madman ? " "He has not the bearing." "A poet inspired by a *jinn* ? " "He does not speak in classic verse." "A magician ? " "He does not perform wonders. . . ." They could more easily credit him with being a magician who broke up families with his charms.

They also tried to cajole Mahomet, but uselessly. 'Otba ben Rabi'a went on their behalf to propose money and honours for him, and even to suggest doctors to cure him of his strange sickness.

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The leading Qoraishites, the most important adversaries of Islam, watched carefully that nobody was allowed to be won over. Akhnas was moved when he heard Mahomet praying at night, and told his impressions to Abu Sofyan and then to Abu Jahl.

“I understood a portion of what he said,” he confessed, “but the rest was out of my reach.”

Abu Jahl flew into a passion with this weak creature.

“Until now,” cried the aristocratic Makhzumite, “we rivalled the descendants of ‘Abdelmanaf and Hashim. Like us, they provided for the poor ; like us, they paid penances for others ; our families were like race-horses galloping in the front. And now these people have the advantage over us of a Prophet who communicates with heaven !”

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RESURRECTION

*The Striking ! What is the striking ?  
And what shall make thee to understand how terrible the striking will be ?  
On that day men shall be like moths scattered abroad,  
And the mountains shall become like carded wool . . . driven by the  
wind.*

Koran, ci, 1-4.

THEY nearly always argued with Mahomet ironically. Some of them denied the immortality of the soul. Others were willing enough to admit that in one sense it outlived the body, taking the form of an owl that flew around the tomb with plaintive cries, bringing messages from the dead, and demanding vengeance if the defunct had been murdered. Often they slaughtered a camel on the tomb or allowed it to die of starvation, to supply the dead person with a steed in the world of shadows. But they smiled sceptically when they heard Mahomet speak endlessly of the Resurrection, the final Judgment and the Last Hour. These dogmas, the main points in his preachings, appeared absurd to them. He answered them that the wonders of creation were all quite as extraordinary, and that it was no more impossible to be re-born than to be born.

Obayy ben Khalaf showed him an old bone, asking :  
“ Will this be brought to life ? ”  
“ Yes, and by God.”

Obayy ben Khalaf crumbled the bone between his fingers and puffed the dust in the face of the Prophet, who repeated :

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“ Yes, God will bring it to life again ; he will also bring you to life again and will send you to hell.”

El 'Aci, the father of the illegitimate 'Amr, owed money to a Mahometan, and said to him ;

“ I will pay you in the next world.”

And Mahomet went into a trance and prophesied :

How can man be so ungrateful ? What has blinded him to such an extent that he can no longer see the blessings of his Lord ? When God said to the earth and the seven heavens : “ Come to me, either willingly or unwillingly ”, the earth and the seven heavens replied : “ Here we are ; we are come to you in all obedience ”. But man is rebellious ; man, the king of the earth, proceeding from Adam before whom the angels were commanded to bow down ; man, “ created in most beautiful mould ” by God who sent him holy books and prophets to teach him “ that which he knew not ”. Ah ! May he deliberate while there is yet time ! A day will come when reflection serves him nothing, a day when the earth shall be reduced to minute particles, a day when a monstrous hell shall vomit forth flames in the midst of an overwhelming deluge.

Mahomet loved his fellow-citizens. He sang of the glories of Mecca and of his temple which God had preserved from Abraha's desecration. He looked forward to the union of the Qoraishites and the prosperity of their trade. He not only offered them heavenly blessings but earthly ones as well if they would be loyal. God had shown them special kindness in sending the Arabs a Prophet of their own race such as they had never had before, as well as a book disclosed in their own language. By these means they could save themselves from the terrors of the Last Hour. And if they rejected these divine advances,

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there would be no possible excuse for them. The fact that God had chosen neither a lofty, rich nor learned person must not astonish them. God had chosen who pleased him. Woe to them who only believed in this world's blessings ! Doubly guilty, they would only have their consolation here below, and their true life would be lost to them. Why were the powerful and wealthy always in opposition to the prophets ?

True, he brought "joyful tidings" to the believers, but to the unwilling spirits, dreadful tidings. Mahomet was totally possessed by his great intuitive message and he no longer had the least doubt. He stood up and shouted out his message :

*Concerning what do the unbelievers ask questions of one another ?  
... the great news of the Resurrection*

*About which they disagree.*

*Assuredly they shall hereafter know the truth thereof.*

*... Every creature which liveth on the earth is subject to decay :  
But the glorious and honourable countenance of thy Lord shall remain  
for ever.*

The wicked, the mockers, the ungrateful, the sceptics, might forget their troubles, hide their want of understanding and misery from themselves, but on the day when "the heart comes into the mouth" and "the earth shakes off its burden", they would not cut such fine figures ! He who laughs last laughs

*And whosoever shall have wrought good of the weight of an ant  
shall behold the same. And whosoever shall have wrought evil of  
the weight of an ant, shall behold the same.*

Koran, xcix, 7-8.

The Hour is at hand ; the Hour is come ; the inevitable Day of Judgment shall suddenly come. . . . "God's command is at hand," said the Prophet,

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as the Christians in the catacombs said : “*Maram atha*”—“The Lord is at hand.”

The Prophet called the whole universe to witness. God swore by the stars, the heavens and the zodiac, by the angels and all creation, by the hours, the dawn, the morning, the afternoon, the twilight, by the fig and the olive, by Mt. Sinai and the sacred territory of Mecca. . . .

*I swear by the sun and its rising brightness ;  
By the moon when she followeth him ;  
By the day, when it sheweth his splendour ;  
By the night, when it covereth him with darkness ;  
By the heaven, and Him who built ;  
By the earth, and Him who spread it forth ;  
By the soul, and Him who completely formed it. . . .  
Now is he who hath purified the same, happy ;  
But he who hath corrupted the same, miserable. . . .*

So this succession of terrifying suras ran, depicting the Resurrection, the Last Judgment, heaven and hell, as well as the warning of the prophets throughout the ages to different peoples.

The heaven shall be rent asunder, the moon be eclipsed, the stars be scattered. The trumpet shall sound. . . .

*On that day man shall say, Where is a place of refuge ?  
By no means : there shall be no place to fly unto.  
With thy Lord shall be the true mansion. . . .*

Each man must be responsible for his own actions, must be the “slave of his own deeds” which will be weighed in the balance. God, so tender and so filled with love and so forgiving to “all those who come unto him”, is the same God who “inflicts terrible punishment” on the rebellious, the unbelieving, the miserly, who never pray nor give food to the poor nor consider the orphan ; who deny the

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Resurrection, passing their days in frivolous talk. These are the “wicked people” ; they will never be admitted into paradise until the camel has passed through the needle’s eye. The deluge and unconsuming fire await them. As soon as one skin has been consumed they will be furnished with another, and their undergarments shall be of tar.

*They shall not taste any refreshment therein, or any drink  
Except boiling water, and filthy corruption.*

They shall only eat of disgusting fruits shaped like demons’ heads or the tree of Zakkum. They shall dwell in everlasting fire, at least for as long as God sees fit. Certainly,

*Hell shall be a . . . . receptacle for the transgressors, who shall remain therein for ages.*

On the other hand, the virtuous believers in God and his angels, in prophets and the future life ; those who gave alms and aided their neighbours, returned good for evil, fed the poor and the captive while they themselves hungered ; those who gave themselves over completely to Islam.

*How happy shall the companions on the right hand be !  
They shall dwell in gardens of delight,  
Reposing on couches adorned with gold and precious stones. . . .  
Youths which shall continue in their bloom for ever  
Shall go round about to attend them, with goblets and beakers, and a  
cup of flowing wine :  
Their heads shall not ache by drinking the same, neither shall their  
reason be disturbed. . . .*

Neither shall they feel the heat of the sun nor the icy cold ; they shall dwell amongst “trees without thorns and well-set mimosas”, under palm and pomegranate trees eating the fruits that please them, beside streams running with pure water, milk, wine

## THE RESURRECTION

and honey. Dressed in silks and decked with bracelets of gold and pearls, they shall lean on brocade-lined carpets and take their delight with *houris* "of modest look, who have never been touched by man or *jinn*" —*houris* with large, black eyes, ever-renewed virginities and complexions resembling ostrich eggs.

These descriptions of green lands, coolness, clear water, sensual delights were such as could easily convince these Arabs oppressed by a fiery climate, these Qoraishites tortured in the furnace of Mecca without trees, shade or streams. They were generally believed to the letter and corresponded, moreover, to Adam's Eden, for Islam (excepting for certain mystics who distinguished between the blessings sprung from paradise and the Beatific Vision) did not seem to understand very clearly the difference between the earthly paradise and heaven properly so-called. But this is a point which is not very clear even in Christian doctrine.

Aside from the fact that many find these descriptions largely symbolical, we must admit that the paradise described by Mahomet allows not only sensual pleasures. There the *greatest* felicities are "the pardoning of sins," and the "greeting given the elect by their merciful Lord" or the sight of his divine Countenance.

*God is well pleased with them : this shall be great felicity.*

Koran, ix, 73.

"God," said Mahomet after St. Paul, "has prepared for his worshippers things which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and which have never before reached the soul of any human being."

*Thou shalt not hear therein any vain discourse, nor any charge of sin ;  
But only the salutation, Peace ! Peace !*

Koran, lvi, 24-25.

During all epochs, the people were divided according to their attitude into *kafirūn* (ingrates or infidels) and *moslimūn* (Mussulmans : obedient and resigned to God). In the beginning, the first worshippers—souls sprung from the loins of mystical Adam—pledged themselves freely to recognize God as their Lord. They must keep their pledge on this earth and await the prophets' summons ; as the law always remained the same no distinction was made between the prophets. According to Koranic notions, the Mussulman thinkers looked upon history as a cyclic yet discontinuous thing, a pageant of monotheistic but moral experiences, a perpetual alternation between ignorance and revelation, disobedience and punishment.

When Mahomet related the Biblical stories of the prophet, Nadhr ben el Harith, a Qoraishite who had travelled in 'Iraq, endeavoured to spoil the effect by

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*beginning to tell Persian legends and the deeds of Rustom and the Isfendiars, which three centuries later furnished Firdawsi with his material for the Shah nameh.*<sup>1</sup>

“ Is it not just as beautiful and more so than what Mahomet relates ? He is only telling the old legends he has heard from the mouths of men more learned than himself, and put into writing, just as I have heard these tales in my travels.”

There were not only scoffing materialists or absolute evil-doers fighting against the Prophet. Often in the history of man the abiding question is really more complex ; it is not always easy to distinguish the true from the false, the good from the evil. Amongst the opponents on both sides were honest patriots blinded by nationalism who feared for their political independence or the spiritual autonomy of their race. There were some who were afraid of falling out with the neighbouring tribes by forsaking their gods ; others feared Mahomet as a claimant to the temporal power, which he eventually held through their own opposition and the trend of affairs. Sincere and upright traditionalists existed like Abu Tâlib who, while defending his own nephew against his enemies through a sense of honour and family solidarity, nevertheless combated him as an iconoclastic innovator, looking upon him as a betrayer of the ancestral religion.

When Mahomet preached to the Bedouins returned from the markets or pilgrimages, Abu Tâlib, with no malicious intentions, endeavoured to undo the effect of his words. Among the Prophet’s determined enemies were two men of great worth : the haughty

<sup>1</sup> “ The Book of Kings.” Firdawsi : an historian-poet of Persia.

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Abu Sofyan and the chivalrous sheikh, Walid ben Moghîra, who gave his protection to the enthusiastic Mussulman, 'Othman ben Mathun, deserted by everyone else ; but since these men looked upon Mahomet as an enlightened fanatic they were not too severe with him.

In the everlasting fight between tradition and evolution, there is not always a fixed criterion ; sometimes the new idea is purely negative, sometimes merely faithful to the true traditionalist spirit. No matter whether in the time of Buddha, of the catacombs, of Mahomet or of the French Revolution good and evil were always entangled. If the nihilist spirit is detestable, a certain form of it called reaction is none the less so. Injustice is a disorder just as much as anarchy, and the tyrant is often a rebel against the true order.

Sometimes it is traditionalism which carefully tends the sacred flame of the life-spirit, and sometimes revolution re-lights this flame which its guardians have allowed to die down. From time to time the Prophet is needed to remind the priest what he is living for. Traditions are life itself whose evolution is like that of an organism ; they cannot withstand the puritanism of abstract reason which tries to sweep everything away, although the traditions would stifle if they became fossilized. *Oportet haereses esse.*<sup>1</sup> We must always have heretics to prevent this crystallization ; but also, death will be the complete triumph of these heretics. For life, whether individual or social, is perpetually balanced—inconstantly, delicately, perilously. Genuine nihilism and jacobinism are as deadly as routine and abuses. In every religion mystics

<sup>1</sup> "We must have heretics" (St. Paul).

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and saints are needed endlessly to represent the prerogatives of inspiration, which the law is obliged to canalize and "canonize". Thus, the living ethics crystallize into "bourgeois" ethics ; it is easy to err in this direction ; this often happens. The non-ethical in our day make this mistake. As for the Pharisees who opposed Jesus and the Qoraishites who persecuted Mahomet, we must rather reproach these people who wished to crush the great men with not being ethical enough instead of being too ethical.

Not only did madmen like Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab and 'Oqba contradict Mahomet, but men of distinction, as well, like Abu Tâlib, or reasonable and relatively restrained men like Abu Sofyan. Marcus Aurelius, like Nero, thought it a duty to persecute the Christians. The martyrs of the catacombs died for truth but their persecutors, the old Romans, who had inherited the traditions of Cato and Cicero's finest philosophy, did not lack nobility. As Jesus foretold, they thought to serve God by putting his confessors to death. During the Revolution the members of the Convention and the emigrants had every serious reason to combat each other. Both were right and both were wrong, and both forgot something essential. The learned are rare who can see the different aspects which each thing presents. Often they fight against what they believe they worship, and worship, really, what they appear to be fighting against. By a paradox, either humorous or discouraging, would not some of those who defend Christianity to-day have been logically among its persecutors in Nero's time ? And would not many of the *Ulema* of Qaraouyine and of El Azhar, had they been alive in 615, have fought against Mahomet, Abu Bakr and 'Ali, just as certain Christians to-day would re-crucify Christ ?

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The troubled Qoraishites sent Nadhr and 'Oqba to consult the Jewish rabbis of Yathrib who represented the learning of the time and who proposed many questions for Mahomet to answer ; Mahomet asked for twenty-four hours' grace. But the next day, he had nothing to answer, for the angel had not come to speak to him. For fifteen days it was the same ; the revelation was interrupted. The unhappy Prophet spent the nights in agony. To his spiritual sufferings were joined the humiliation of a painful situation, public jibings, his adversaries' triumph and even the doubts of adherents.

At last Mahomet saw his celestial friend ; his ears hummed, a procession of harmonious ideas and phrases were imprinted on his soul. He delivered the consolation addressed to him and answered the insidious questions.

No, God had not deceived his servant in sending him the Book (" an upright book wherein no deceitful things were written "), designed to warn men of punishments, as well as of divine rewards.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CONVERSIONS OF HAMZA AND 'OMAR

*Whomsoever God shall please to direct, he will open his breast to receive the faith of Islam. . . .*

Koran, vi, 125.

A NUMBER of conversions having been effected, the aristocracy of Mecca decided to punish by banishment any new converts to Islam. Mahomet immured himself in the house of his disciple, 'Orqam, on the Hill of Safa; but his enemies' hatred pursued him even to this retreat. Abu Jahl, who met him one day on the hill, insulted him grossly and even hit him. Mahomet bore this outrage stoically, but his uncle, Hamza, returning from the hunt, learned of it. Although Hamza disapproved of his nephew's ideas, such an insult to a member of his family made his blood boil. With his long-bow still over his shoulder, Hamza hurried to the Ka'ba steps where Abu Jahl was boasting about his heroic deed, and dealt him a blow with the bow, seriously wounding his head. Hamza was a giant, all of one piece, of Herculean strength, extremely courageous and with no cerebral complexities. His energy impressed everyone. Abu Jahl himself prevented his friends from interfering, for he recognized that he was wrong to treat Mahomet so harshly. He therefore asked pardon, demanding the latter's opinions in regard to the mother-religion.

"Well!" cried Hamza, "it is time you knew.

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Neither do I any longer believe in your stone gods ! I testify that there is but one God Allah and that Mahomet is his Prophet."

Anger had produced in his heart what sense and persuasion had failed to do. He returned instantly to take oath to his nephew and he became one of the firmest champions of Islam.

'Omar ben el Khattâb, an impetuous young man of twenty-six, very tall, of indomitable energy, a nephew on the maternal side to Abu Jahl, went one day towards Safa, they say, declaring that he would avenge his uncle and punish the false Prophet—the sower of dissension. On the way he met someone who said to him : " Before killing Mahomet and bringing down the vengeance of his family on us, you had best make sure first that your own family is incorrupted. . . . "

" What do you mean ? " thundered 'Omar.

" I only say what I know. Your sister Amina and her husband Sa'id have embraced Islam. Didn't you know it ? "

Without taking trouble to reply, 'Omar turned back and hurried with indignation to his sister's house. Entering brusquely, he threw himself on Sa'id, hurled him on the ground, placed one foot on his chest and was ready to thrust his sword into his throat, when the astonished Amina intervened. 'Omar struck his sister.

" Enemy of God, " she cried, her face all bloody, " Is it because I believe in God that you treat me like this ? Well ! I shall testify none the less that there is no other God than Him and that Mahomet is his Prophet. And now, finish your work ; kill me, kill me, then ! "

Ashamed of his brutality, 'Omar lifted his foot from

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Sa'id's breast and withdrew into a corner of the room for a moment, not knowing what to do or say.

"What were you doing," he said at last, "when I came in? Show me what you have in your hand!"

As a matter of fact, Sa'id and his wife were surprised by the ardent young man while reading a sura from the Koran, the XXth sura, telling the story of Moses, the fall of the devil (Iblis) and Adam's sin, transcribed on a piece of sheepskin; this they had at once hidden. Amina hesitated to show him this precious writing, fearing he might destroy it. At last, seeing him appeased, she handed him the parchment.

'Omar was seized with an irresistible emotion; each verse imprinted more strongly on his heart sympathy for a faith expressed in such a beautiful manner.

The impetuous son of El Khattâb went to find his uncle, Abu Jahl, to inform him that he now abjured his protection; moreover he was assured of that of El 'Asi ben Waïl, the sheikh of the Banu Sahm.

His conversion made a considerable impression. When it became public a crowd gathered around his house in such a menacing fashion that his son, 'Abdallah, was very much afraid.

"Ah!" said 'Omar to them, "if we were only three hundred believers, you would not quarrel with us about this temple and you would soon see who were the masters of it." El 'Asi ben Waïl, who passed by, managed to quiet the crowd.

Fearing for his nephew's safety, Abu Tâlib offered him shelter of a sort of stronghold on the mountain; Mahomet hid there with his disciples, protected by the members of his family, the Hashimites. The only one amongst them who refused to come with them was Abu Lahab, who stayed in Mecca with the declared enemies

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of the Prophet. So the other Qoraishites at the instigation of the Ommayad Abu Sofyan and the Makhzumite Abu Jahl, decided to evict the Hashimites. The decree of excommunication was posted in the Ka'ba, the first month of the year 617. It forbade all communication, all commerce, all marriage, with the descendants of 'Abdelmottalib, as long as they would not deliver over Mahomet.

The Qoraishites were exasperated upon learning of the Negus's refusal to deliver over the Mahometans sheltering in Abyssinia. Mahomet, the scorner of ancestry, was allied to a foreign sovereign !

## CHAPTER IX

### CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

*Thou shalt surely find those among them to be the most inclinable to entertain friendship for the true believers, who say : " We are Christians ". This cometh to pass because there are priests and monks among them ; and because they are not elated with pride.*

Koran, v, 85.

THE Mahometans who were obliged to flee from Mecca and the persecutions of the Qoraishites had found shelter in Abyssinia in the Christian States of the Negus. This country was then at its zenith. It possessed a powerful navy and its commerce was prosperous, and had, as we have seen, conquered Southern Arabia some time before. It was an ally of the powerful Byzantine Empire. As it stood for monotheism it held a great enchantment for Mahomet's imagination ; he declared that the negroes were made up of nine-tenths courage. Afterwards he forbade his people to ever attack the Abyssinians first ; he wore mourning for the death of the Negus.

This sovereign kindly gathered together the exiles and interrogated them on their faith.

" We were plunged in the shadows of ignorance," said one of them, Ja'far ben Abi Tâlib, Mahomet's first cousin. " We worshipped idols, we recognized the law of the strongest, when God set up one amongst us, a man of our own race, who commanded us to

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profess God's oneness and cast out superstitions. He commanded us to shun vice and to practice virtue, to be sincere, devout, charitable, chaste. He made us pray, give alms and fast. We believed in his mission."

Still, the Qoraishites sent ambassadors to Abyssinia, 'Amr ben el 'Asi, the poet, and 'Abdallah ben Rabi'a, to ask the Negus to deliver over the Mahometan fugitives. The king had them brought into the palace and, in the presence of the ambassadors and the notables of his Court and the bishops of the land, he questioned Ja'far as to the doctrines he professed. Ja'far recited by memory the XIXth sura from the Koran entitled "Mary". He spoke of how God sent a child called John the Baptist (Yahya) to old Zacharias. Then he told of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary and of the marvellous birth of Jesus ('Isa).

*He (the angel) appeared unto her in the shape of a perfect man.  
She said: I fly for refuge unto the merciful God, that he may defend  
me from thee. . . .  
He answered: Verily, I am the messenger of thy Lord, and am sent  
to give thee a holy son.  
She said: How shall I have a son, seeing a man hath not touched me,  
and I am no harlot?  
Gabriel replied: So shall it be: thy Lord saith. This is easy with  
me; and we will perform it, that we may ordain him for a sign  
unto men, and a mercy from us: for it is a thing which is decreed.  
Wherefore she conceived him. . . .  
Verily (said Jesus) I am the servant of God; he hath given me the  
book of the Gospel, and hath appointed me as a prophet. . . .  
And peace be on me the day whereon I was born, and the day whereon  
I shall die, and the day whereon I shall be raised to life.*

On hearing this recitation, half-taken from the

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Gospels, the Abyssinian bishops were astonished and said :

“ In truth, these words come from the same source as those of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

‘Amr and ‘Abdallah, unwilling to admit themselves defeated, advised the Negus to ask the Mahometans next day what exactly this Jesus was, according to them.

And the next day Ja‘far declared that according to Mahomet, Jesus (prayer and peace descend on him) was “ the servant of God, the Messenger of the Most High, the Verb and the Spirit of God, descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary ”.

“ Truly,” the Negus cried, transported with joy and tracing a line on the ground with his stick, “ between your faith and ours there is not more than this little stroke.”

Alas ! During centuries the space has widened, the imperceptible stroke now resembles an impassable trench.

The Negus energetically refused the extradition of the Mahometans and never ceased to show them the greatest kindness.

We would perhaps be astonished, after all the misunderstandings which have arisen during centuries between the two religions, to see such accord between dawning Islam and Christianity. But such was the case. Mahomet looked upon himself as a Christian, as one of a number of prophets entrusted to bring his people over to monotheism and to furnish them with a book in his own language resembling the Pentateuch, the Psalms and the Gospels, often cited as revealed books.

There is no doubt that he was affected by Christian influences. Arab *hanifs* like Zaid, Nestorian monks

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like Bahîra (although the latter's history is legendary in Mussulman tradition, it nevertheless is founded on fact) and Christians of Mecca like Waraqa, awakened his religious inclinations before his mission ; he afterwards tried to augment his knowledge through them but without much success, for they were rather ignorant.

The Christians whose various churches encircled Arabia had even penetrated scantily into the heart of the peninsula. Many tribes were more or less Christian. Imrou'lqaïs, the great poet, who stole the clothing from some beautiful bathers so that he could have the joy of seeing them naked, was none the less officially Christian, as were two other authors of *mu'allaqahs*, Tarafa and Nabigha Dhobyani, and divers poets of the time, all of them able, through the medium of their rich language, to make hundreds of verses on one rhyme in a style as fiery and throbbing as the desert wind.

Mahomet had made the acquaintance of a great many Christians in his native town, principally amongst the slaves, nearly all Abyssinian, and also amongst the Byzantines, Copts, and Arabs of the Christian tribes. He was often to be found at Marwa near the workshop of a Greek sword-maker, Jabr, one of the slaves of the 'Amir ben el Hadhrami. This artisan and his friend Yasar, another Christian from the country of the Rum, worked to increase the revenues of the 'Amir.

The Qoraishites declared that it was this young man who had inspired the Prophet, although his tongue was foreign (the Koran tells us) and the Koran is pure Arabic. Mahomet, however, never denied having gained instruction from the Christians and from the Bible stories, primarily.

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The Christians of various origins were numerous enough to have their own cemetery at Mecca. The blacks formed the mercenary army of the Ahabish. Khadija's hairdresser was a Christian Abyssinian. Zaid, his adopted son, came from the converted tribe of the Banu Kalb. On one occasion a group of Abyssinian Christians on their way to Mecca stopped to greet the new Prophet. The fact that these *People of the Book* confirmed his words was one of the best arguments in Mahomet's favour to the idolaters. At 'Okadh and other markets he met Christian Arabs from Najran and Hira, and one time he heard the famous Bishop Quss preaching. According to the Koran he saw other Christians in the bazaars he frequented, amongst them many Syrians who monopolized the importation of wheat.

Most of the doctors and dentists were Christians, and the schoolmasters, whom they sought out in Hira amongst the Lakhmides. Abu Sofyan's father-in-law and son-in-law ; the husband of Omm Habiba, one of the prettiest women in Arabia whom Mahomet afterwards married ; Sawda, whose first husband adopted this faith in Abyssinia, were all Christians.

Some Ghassanides dependents of the Banu Asad lived in the very centre of Mecca near the Ka'ba, but the greater part of the Christians lived in the outskirts.

In the workshops of the wealthy Makhzumites were hundreds of foreign, Christian slaves, one of whom Mahomet frequented particularly. 'Abbas, his uncle, who owned a Greek woman slave, presented Mahomet with a Coptic man slave, Abu Rafi'. On the whole there were few families in Mecca who did not possess amongst their members a certain number of Christians, especially amongst their slaves, their freedmen or

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their dependents ; the names of many have come down to us. Other people were merely passing travellers, like the oculist-monk who cured Mahomet when a child with the dust of Sinai, or like the handsome deacon who caused such a sensation in Mecca. In the main, these Christians were foreigners ; and to this can be attributed the reason why the leading Meccans suspected the Mussulmans.

At this time the two great Empires of Persia and Greece stood face to face in the battle which mutually sapped the last vestiges of strength from these fast-dying, although still enchanting, countries.

Chosroes Eparwiz, destined to be slain as a prisoner in the "House of Shadows" (628), but first dethroned by his son, Chiroes, as he himself had dethroned his father, Hormuzd, and then killed him, was at the height of his power. "The firmament revolves according to my wishes. I have full treasure-troves. The whole country is at work for me . . .," he declared in the ingenuousness of his pride. He had put together the fragments of Darius's throne decorated with the signs of the zodiac, and there he sat in winter surrounded by a curtain of beaver and sable, and gold and silver balls filled with hot water. Over his head was an enormous crown suspended from the canopy. His hunts were displays of unheard-of luxury : he rode dressed in gold brocade covered with golden trinkets, accompanied by young princes in red, violet and yellow costumes, by huntsmen with falcons on their wrists, valets holding the leashes of trained leopards, slaves carrying perfumes and fly-whisks, musicians. In order to enjoy the sensation of spring in winter he sat with his court upon a great carpet several acres in dimension, woven with the design of the roads and the landscapes of the Empire, with

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fields, green forests, silver rivers and many-coloured flowers. His army comprised nine hundred elephants, his harem twelve thousand women.

Persian influence became all-important in Arabia. Chosroes drove out the Abyssinians, and in 614 took Jerusalem, captured Syria and invaded Egypt. The Christians' defeat seemed complete. The relics of the True Cross were plundered and carried into Persia.

At Mecca the vicissitudes of this war were followed with the liveliest interest and formed the topic of conversation in the square of the Ka'ba in the evenings. The pagan Qoraishites sympathized with the Persians and the Mussulmans with the Byzantines ; the former were enraptured by the victories of Chosroes, and one of them expressed his satisfaction to Abu Bakr one day.

"The Greeks will have their revenge," Abu Bakr said to him. "Do not rejoice too soon."

"You lie."

"You lie still more, enemy of God ; I wager six young camels that the Greeks will be victorious over the Magians before the year is out."

When Mahomet heard them speak of this wager, he at once advised his friend to raise the time-limit and the stakes. Abu Bakr wagered one hundred camels that the defeat of the Persians would take place before nine years. He won his bet in the year 625 when the Emperor Heraclius beat the Persians and re-captured devastated Syria.

The Koran had prophesied this victory and sura XXX entitled *The Greeks* bears witness to Mahomet's Christian sympathies : "The Greeks have been overcome . . . in the nearest part of the land ; but after their defeat they shall overcome the others in their turn,

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*within a few years. . . . On that day shall the believers rejoice. . . ."*

Mahomet actually did rejoice at Heraclius's victory ; he also rejoiced over the death of Chosroes, foreseeing that it would hasten the decay of his empire which would soon fall under the blows of the Arabs after having been weakened by those of the Byzantines. The faint-hearted Chiroes, consumed with remorse at having murdered his father and brothers, and sick with so many horrors, soon died of melancholy. Heraclius triumphantly restored the True Cross to Jerusalem and in several years a dozen short-lived kings succeeded to the weak throne of the Sassanides.

Mahomet did not conceal his Christian sympathies, as the Koran proves in other passages beside the verses on the Greco-Persian war. It brings forward as examples the Christian martyrs of the first centuries and the more recent martyrs of Yemen. It eulogizes the monks and the priests whose virtues the Prophet extolled to the borders of Syria. And he rejoiced because the Greek victory prevented the destruction of the monasteries and the churches, "where God's name is endlessly called upon." Mahomet regarded these *People of the Book* as the allies who confirmed his words, who believed in the truths he predicted, or rather in those he recalled (for we are assured that the Arab Koran resembles earlier books), and who wept with religious emotion upon hearing his revelations. Mahomet used this adherence of the learned *People of the Book* as a proof of the veracity of Islam to the idolaters who alone "denied the signs". He declared that his mission was announced in the Gospels and applied the parable of the good seed to the Mussulmans. Even when he broke with the Jews, Mahomet spared the Christians and tried to

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keep on good terms with the Greeks, Abyssinians, and Egyptians. He reserved his anathemas for the Jews and idolaters alone.

*Thou shalt surely find the most violent of all men in enmity against the true believers to be the Jews and the idolaters : and thou shalt surely find those among them to be the most inclinable to entertain friendship for the true believers who say : We are Christians. This cometh to pass, because there are priests and monks among them ; and because they are not elated with pride.*

Koran, v, 85.

The text is explicit. It adds that the Jews, the Christians and the Sabians (a Christian sect, either *mandaiite* or *ebionite* (?)) practising ablution, who must not be confounded with the Sabain star-worshippers) will be saved like the Mussulmans if they do good works and believe in God and the Last Day—an affirmation that the intolerant Mussulman divines took a great deal of trouble in trying to whittle down. The Koran distinguishes carefully between the Christians, and the pagans who "link with God" other divinities ; it endows the Apostles with the title of *moslimun*, submissive.

The Koran allows Mussulmans to marry Christians and to eat their food, and this, says Mohammed 'Abdu, the modern reformer, is an indication of genuine fraternity. In spite of certain aspects, it is not difficult to trace the Christian dogmas in it : the original sin of Adam, expelled from paradise for eating of the forbidden fruit, the solidarity of human beings, the expulsion and fall of Satan from heaven for having refused to worship Adam (as the Christian devil for his refusal to believe in the Incarnate Word, theologians suppose), the missions of Noah, Abraham, Moses and the prophets, holy books, guardian angels,

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*the Messiah, Antichrist, the end of the world, the Resurrection, and the Last Judgment. In all these things Islam shows that it is nearer related to Christianity than to Judaism.*

There are indisputable analogies between the first Mussulmans and the first Christians ; their courage in suffering persecutions, their love of martyrdom (the combatants in the holy war are themselves considered martyrs), the same taste for prayer and pious vigils, for poverty, alms-giving (the monks' influence), and even their anxiety about the end of the world.

It may seem a paradox to assert that Islam also held to the dogmas of the Incarnation, the Redemption and the Immaculate Conception. Contrary to the ordinary interpretation it is not impossible to find all these things in the Koran. This book grants formally that Jesus was the Messiah, his miraculous birth from the womb of a virgin, his mission, his miracles, his ascension, and the Lord's Supper as well (*sura of The Table*). One of the sternest reproaches it makes to the Jews is for their vile calumnies of Mary. "God has chosen thee," the angel said to her, "and exempted thee from all stains. Thou art the chosen amongst women." And in the *hadiths*, Mahomet definitely states that all men at birth are marked by the devil's claw and that, "Only for Mary and Jesus was an exception made."

As it happens, Jesus' status was exceptional. Born a stranger to ordinary human conditions, he is the only messenger of God who, in the Koran, discourses publicly with God of his intentions and speaks of his vocation in the first person. He is the Living Word of God and not only the passing executor of his revelation. The Koran says he was impeccable,

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whereas in this book Mahomet acknowledged himself sometimes guilty of error.

The Koran speaks like Christian orthodoxy when it says that Jesus is the Word (the Verb) of God, the Spirit or the Soul (*rouh*) of God descended into the womb of the Virgin Mary, while at the same time it speaks of the falsity of not looking on Jesus as a normal man. When it mentions the Incarnation and the Trinity, what it really criticizes are not so much these dogmas in themselves as their heretical interpretation. It blames Monophysitism, Eutychianism, Collyridism and other Christian heresies of the day and not the orthodox idea. A Christian can only assent when it is affirmed preternatural to believe in a Trinity made up of Jesus, Mary and God.

*O Jesus, son of Mary, hast thou said unto men :  
Take me and my mother for two gods, besides God ?*

Koran, v, 116.

In the Orient there existed, in fact, sects who worshipped Mary. The Collyridians, says St. Epiphany, offered little cakes (*collyris*) as sacrifices to the Virgin, like those offered to Ceres by the pagans. Afterwards they were eaten.

Without admitting that the Koran is wrong on the question of fact, we must realize that it only condemns an erroneous conception of this dogma. (Ibn Hisham, one of the Prophet's first and most important biographers, like many other Mussulmans, believed that Mary belonged to the Christian Trinity.) Although it does not say that the Trinity is a false dogma, it says : Do not falsely interpret this dogma.

When it says that God had no children, it speaks literally. There is a simple mistake in reference to

This is obvious. The pagan Arabs really believed that the angels, and the three goddesses, El Lât, El 'Ozza and Manât, were God's daughters ; the Koran contraverts this enormity. In the same way when it states :

*God is one.  
He begetteth not, neither is he begotten :  
And there is not any one like unto him.*

Koran, cxii.

the point in question is not the second hypostasis, but the divine substance, of which a Lateran Council spoke in exactly the same terms.

When the Mussulman theologians say that the Koran, or God's Word, was everlasting, they merely say the same thing as the Christians when speaking of Christ's divinity. The Koran qualified Jesus as the Word of Allah. In the eighth century St. John of Damascus said : " If you say that the Word and Spirit of God are everlasting, we agree ; if you say they were created, must we admit that formerly God had neither Word nor Spirit ? " We might also say that the dogma of the Incarnation, without mentioning its metaphysical and moral significations, otherwise

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than that it bridges the gulf between man and God, realizes in one sense the Mussulman ideal in giving God a perfect worshipper worthy only of Him.

Finally, all that the Koran says in reference to the Christian dogma is true, and if it does not contain everything that is true, the earlier Scriptures plainly complete it.

The most delicate point is the Crucifixion. Historical Islam seems not to have understood the idea of the Redemption, although we may add that they had no necessity to dwell on it since they already had the Gospels, which the Koran corroborates. Islam did not look upon Jesus as a saviour and mediator. It would seem that the great idea of salvation which conquered and transformed the pagan world—salvation through the blood of Christ and God's love for His people for whom He went so far as to give His only Son—was consequently opposed to the Islamic notion of an abyss separating God and His worshippers. . . . An intensive effort towards refinement of the divine ideal, and a conception of transcendency not without grandeur, but likely to become extremely abstract and to misconstrue the great revelation of Christianity : "God is Love" with its accompanying illumination of the object of creation and the aim of Life.

The Mussulmans would not admit that God who loved Christ could allow him to suffer, be humiliated and put to death by his enemies, just as the Jews could only understand the triumph of the Messiah as an earthly conqueror of the Gentiles in this kingdom of the world. However, the Koran declares that to kill one man is the same as killing all men, and to save one man is the same as saving the human race, a statement which reminds us of the well-known

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text from St. Paul : " For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. "

Mussulman tradition believed that Christ was not ignominiously put to death on the cross, but that God took Him unto Himself, only leaving in the Jews' hands an unreal phantom, or another man who was mistaken for Jesus. If this belief (already very strange in the light of history and rationalism, and which the most beautiful account in the world omits) were accepted, the entire fabric of Christianity would be based upon a mistake, and accordingly God would have founded a religion on a self-committed blunder. The belief is based solely upon a rather obscure passage in the *Koran* iv, 156 : they (the Jews) say :

*Verily we have slain Jesus Christ the son of Mary, the apostle of God. Yet they slew him not, neither crucified him, but he was represented by one in his likeness ; and verily they who disagreed concerning him, were in a doubt as to this matter, and had no sure knowledge thereof, but followed only an uncertain opinion. They did not really kill him ; but God took him up unto himself ; and God is mighty and wise.*

The only certain sense of this text (which affirms the Resurrection more than it denies the death, for in the Koran, to be carried up to God and be welcomed by Him is synonymous with dying) is, as has often been said in other texts (iii, 47), that God defeated the ruses of the Jews, foiled their perverse plans, and that Jesus in his essence, far from having been crushed by them, came out of their hands triumphantly. Christianity has the same idea. The Jews hoped to annihilate Christ ; instead of dying for ever, he was resuscitated. When his enemies thought to destroy his work, they unconsciously carried out the sublime

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intentions of the Almighty ; while hoping to do evil, they accomplished what saved the world.

Literally : " For them he was counterfeited " is often translated by " a man who resembled him (or a " vicarious victim ") was put in his place ". That inevitably reminds us of the texts of the New Testament and of St. Paul, of the Lamb of God expiating the sins of the world, of a new Adam substituted for the old, of the vicarious victim who saved the human race by his sacrifice. When we think that the actual texts of the Koran date from the version of 'Othman and Hajjaj, who were responsible for the destruction of all the others, and that on the other hand the manuscripts bearing neither vocalization nor distinguishing points can often be read in different senses, we may ask ourselves if the strange passage, contradicted, moreover, by the others (iii, 48 ; xix, 34 ; v, 117), which affirm the death, the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ, is sufficient to raise an insuperable barrier between two religions united so closely in every other way.

Even if we take it as such, we can still find it acceptable from the orthodox Christian point-of-view ; for the Fathers of the Church say that it is not the Son of God whom the Jews put to death and crucified, but that only the human body of Christ suffered. Understood in this sense, therefore, the Jews were not capable of killing the eternal Word of God but only " the man who resembled him ", the " vicarious victim ", the flesh for which Mary's womb was responsible.

There again the Koran only contradicts the Christian heresies, and not the orthodoxy which perceived two natures in the single person of Jesus.

Jesus, placed thus in heaven beside God, must

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return for the Last Judgment, says the Koran ; also : “ *He shall be a sign of the approach of the last hour . . .* ” (xlivi, 61). He shall be an evidence against the Jews, who will end by believing in him (iv, 157). The misunderstanding between Islam and Christianity was caused by the degenerate state of the latter in the seventh century in the Orient. It was against the heretical sects that Mahomet expressed himself ; in fact, he knew only these sects. Innumerable Apocrypha, besides rabbinical ideas from the Talmud, the Mishna and the Haggada, circulated in the towns of Arabia and even amongst the nomads, often inspiring the desert bards. The Koran contains many traits in common with the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Book of Enoch*, the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Legends of the Saints*, the *Gospel of Barnabas* and the *Gospel of the Infancy* (the legend of the earthen bird, fabricated by the child Jesus, which flew away, comes from this book). Men like Waraqa must have been permeated with this apocryphal literature. The Jew, K‘ab, who gives credit to Mahomet for many Biblical passages, was one of his disciples ; the Prophet’s cousin, Ibn ‘Abbas, made use of the “ Treasure-Cave ” of the pseudo saint Ephrem. In a word, the first Mussulmans knew the Apocrypha (whether directly or orally) and almost seemed to ignore the canonical books.

Arabia was the meeting place of heresies, *haeresium ferax*,<sup>1</sup> said one of the Fathers in the fifth century. It would not have been easy to know where one stood amongst the Sabellians, the Docetes who denied Christ’s human existence (regarding his body as a phantom), the Arians who denied his divinity, the Eutychians, the Jacobites and the Monophysites

<sup>1</sup> “ The meeting-place of heresies.”

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who denied his double nature, the Nestorians who saw in him two persons, the Mariamites and the Collyridians who worshipped Mary, the Antidicomariamites who denied her perpetual virginity, the Judeo-Christian Nazarites and Ebionites, the anti-Jewish Marcionites, the Gnostics, the Valentinians, the Basilidians, the Carpocratians, the Rakusians, etc. . . . There is an Abyssinian proverb which says that the Christians never agree except on one point : the birth of Christ.

Christianity in Arabia, far from being a school of discipline and charity, was divided into sects at enmity with one another, and occupied in sterile discussions. It is not astonishing that Islam wanted to stand aside in these Byzantine quarrels about dogmas. Mahomet would have failed had he simply adhered to any one of these sects. He naturally inclined to place himself above all of them, ignoring, moreover, true orthodoxy, and reproaching them severely, but justly, particularly for their discord (sura v, 17).

The dogmatic quarrelings of the Oriental Christians was a disgrace. After having been persecuted by the pagans, the Christians persecuted each other over nonsensical follies. They killed, imprisoned or exiled each other over the word *homoousios* or the sense of the word *physis*, nature, which the Nestorian school of Antioch understood differently from the Monophysite school of Alexandria. Religion which had become above all intellectual—not intellectual or even intelligent—was debased to mere hair-splitting. The scholars gave theological dissertations ; the people wallowed in superstition while submitting to the contagion.

“ Every corner of the town,” said a Father of the

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Church, "is filled with discussion : markets, clothing-stalls, money-changers and provision-dealers. Do you want to change a gold-piece ? They begin to philosophize upon what is begotten and what is not begotten. Do you want to know the price of bread ? They reply : The Father is greater than the Son. Do you ask if your bath is hot ? The attendant tells you : The Son was created out of nothingness."

A simple, upright spirit such as Mahomet possessed, in communication with the truths sprung from its inner depths in the deep solitude of desert and mountain, recognized religion as something different from an elegant discourse. Each individual interprets God as best he can, but it is important that he be aware of God's reality and submit (*Islam*) to Him. (At a later period, Islamic mystics will state how God is the one Reality.) Dogmatic definitions are necessary in order to avoid errors and to give the intelligence the satisfaction which is its due ; but the theories on the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption would be exceedingly useless if they were merely theories, if one did not adhere to them "with all one's soul", if they were not the systematizing of the most urgent necessities of the spiritual life and of the higher metaphysical truths.

The abyss separating the Christians and the Mussulmans did not actually exist between Islam and Christianity. It was only the result of a misunderstanding. Unfortunately, however, misapprehensions were soon engendered and did not stop growing. The *People of the Book*, although allied with Mahomet at first, refused to recognize him as an authentic prophet. They laughed at this enthusiastic Bedouin ; and the

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Mussulmans in their turn separated themselves as much as possible from Christianity.

The commentators of the Koran, instead of bringing forward analogies, took the greatest pains to deny or to minimize them, and laid special stress upon the apparent divergences. The Koran, strangely enough, is much more akin to Christianity than Tradition. Considering the manner in which it was edited, we may ask ourselves if it was not still more so originally. In all events, it was the *hadiths* of the "traditionists" which raised the obstacle between the two religions ; we know how many of these *hadiths* are vague or suspect.

After the war between Islam and Christianity had been going on for centuries, the misunderstanding naturally increased and we are forced to admit that the most serious ones were at first on the side of the Occidentals. At the finish the Byzantine polemists who crushed Islam with their contempt without taking the trouble to study it (with perhaps the exception of St. John of Damascus), the writers and minstrels fought the Saracens with only ridiculous calumnies. They portrayed Mahomet as a camel-thief, a rake, sorcerer, a brigand chief, even as a Roman cardinal furious at not having been elected pope. . . . They showed him as a false god to whom the faithful made human sacrifices !

The worthy Guibert de Nogent himself tells us that he died through excessive drunkenness and that his corpse was eaten by pigs on a dung-hill, explaining why the flesh of this animal and wine are prohibited. . . .

The opposition of the two religions had not, in the main, any more serious foundations than the affirmations of heroic songs portraying Mahomet, the

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iconoclast, as a golden-idol, and Mussulman mosques as pantheons filled with images ! The *Song of Antioch* describes, as if the author had seen it, a massive idol, Mahom, in gold and silver enthroned on the mosaic seat of an elephant. The *Song of Roland*, which shows Charlemagne's horsemen throwing down Mussulman idols, tells us that the Saracens worshipped a Trinity composed of Termagant, Mahom and Apollo. The *Roman de Mahomet* asserts that Islam permitted polyandry. . . .

Hate and prejudice were tenacious of life. From the time of Rudolph de Ludheim (620) until the present, Nicolas de Cuse, Vivès, Maracci, Hottinger, Bibliander, Prideaux, etc., present Mahomet as an impostor, Islam as the cluster of all the heresies and the work of the devil, the Mussulmans as brutes and the Koran as a tissue of absurdities. They declined to treat such a ridiculous subject seriously. However, Pierre le Vénérable, author of the first Occidental treatise against Islam, made a Latin translation of the Koran in the twelfth century. Innocent III once called Mahomet Antichrist, although in the Middle Ages he was merely looked upon as a heretic, nearly always. Raymond Lull in the fourteenth century, Guillaume Postel in the sixteenth, Roland and Gagnier in the eighteenth, the Abbé de Broglie and Renan in the ninth, give rather varied opinions. Voltaire, afterwards, amended in several places the hasty judgment expressed in his famous tragedy. Montesquieu, like Pascal and Malebranche, committed serious blunders on the religion, but his views on the manners and customs of the Mussulmans are well-considered and often reasonable. Le Comte de Boulainvilliers, Scholl, Caussin de Perceval, Dozy, Sprenger, Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, de Castries, Carlyle, etc., are generally

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favourable to Islam and its Prophet and sometimes vindicate him. In 1876 Droughty none the less called Mahomet "a dirty and perfidious Arab", while in 1822 Foster declared that "Mahomet was Daniel's little goat's horn while the Pope was the large one". Islam still has many ardent detractors.

As for the Mussulman authors, while during the best period of their civilization they studied Christianity rather seriously (employing, at the same time, easy or *Voltairean* arguments before Voltaire), they generally stressed that which divides much more than that which unites ; for a very long time they were almost closed round by disdainful ignorance, considering as *kafirun*, unfaithful, the *People of the Book* and the disciples of Jesus, whom the Koran declares the best friends of the Mussulmans and with whom it commands them to sympathize. Even to-day the larger part of the Mussulmans would rather see their sons dead or criminals than baptised.

These artificial barriers have been left for us to destroy. Light is all that is needed to drive away the shadows. We must remember that the spirit alone vivifies. The sense of true relativity does not destroy the sense of the absolute. The divine revelation comes from the mouths of human beings, adapting itself to times and places. Truth does not come to us in a ready-made mass. It comes to life with the deep consent of our souls. What seems to us contradictory is only the refraction of the eternal ray in the prism of time.

Each individual revelation has its special point ; that of Islam expressed unity, transcendence, God's glory and mercy, as Christianity expresses love. Even paganism, while forgetting Him, did not disown Him, and exalted Him in its own fashion, declaring

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His manifold blessings and tendering scattered, devious and formless truths whose true revelation is rectification, purification and completion. Christianity really includes Islam and something else in addition ; neither explicitly contradicts the other.

Instead of quarrelling among themselves, the various religions should try to compete in worship, ardour and virtue. Through pride and narrow particularism, the greater number of people contemplate that which makes them different from others to the exclusion of the single glory of God.

Who knows, the Koran appears to ask also, if, in one sense, God did not demand a certain particularism differing from fanaticism ? *"If God had pleased he had surely made you one people ; but he has thought fit to try you in that which he has given you. Therefore, strive to excel each other in good works : unto God shall ye all return, and then he will declare unto you that concerning which ye have disagreed"* (v. 53). While waiting let each one follow the path assigned to him—but in all good faith.

Doubtlessly, it is not absolutely unimportant whether deep interior unity is or is not manifested exteriorly (the different Christian churches are divided by lamentable schisms, for example). Surely, it would be more serious to undervalue the deep unity, and sacrifice to appearances the real collaboration for good and worship, thus paying more attention to the letter than to the spirit, to the formulas than to the life expressed by them.

The fact that precepts differ according to time and place is not always without advantages for human progress. Yahweh permitted polygamy for the Patriarchs. The first Christians fought savagely against paganism and when the danger was past

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the church tolerated a certain cult of saints who, if it is not a mistake, greatly assisted the spiritual life. Islam showed itself resolutely iconoclastic, thereby only permitting Mussulman art to produce abstract arabesques in an admirable, decorative style during the same period that Occidental art followed Greece in its reproductions of nature and the human body. Each carried its own work to the greatest possible perfection and the aggregate result was beneficial to civilization. It would be regrettable if we no longer had the portals of Chartres or the Alhambra at Granada.

The reciprocal mistakes and misunderstandings arose at the beginning and increased through strife and political ambition.

For Oriental Christianity, so decadent and at variance, the conquests of the Mussulmans were a fatal punishment and humiliation which, however, might have proved fruitful. The time was not yet ripe for the great Sheepfold and the single Shepherd. The "Saracens" played the rôle of gaoler, forcing Europe to stand upright ; the menace of their presence was a perpetual invitation to Christendom to ameliorate and to surpass itself.

*As to the true believers, and those who Judaize, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, and the idolaters ; verily God shall judge between them on the day of resurrection ; for God is witness of all things. . . .—(Koran, xxii, 17.)*

*Peradventure God will establish friendship between yourselves and such of them as ye now hold for enemies : for God is powerful, and God is inclined to forgive, and merciful.—(Koran, ix. 7.)*

The Koran constantly referred to the Bible and the Gospels ; for it could not contradict them. It even bore with their correction, saying explicitly (x, 94) : "If thou art in a doubt concerning any part of that

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*which we have sent down unto thee* (the Koran), *ask them who have read the Scripture before thee.*" It recalls, confirms, determines and celebrates in magnificent Arab verse certain points of the ancient revelation. It glimpses the future union in the heart of Abraham, "who was neither Jew nor Christian, but obedient to God," Abraham, the Father of all believers.

## CHAPTER X

### THE YEAR OF MOURNING

*Ye shall surely be proved in  
your possessions, and in your  
persons. . . .*

Koran, iii, 182.

AFTER the Hashimites had been banished, Mahomet, his family and his followers took refuge in a *kasba* of the mountain. The decree of excommunication had been written on parchment and posted in the Ka'ba. Mussulmen, half-besieged and unable to work for their livelihood, suffered at times from hunger although, happily for them, they were in communication with Mecca, and secretly provisioned, although only permitted to leave their retreat during the truce of the holy months. The Prophet mingled with pilgrims and preached to them. And for three years this condition was unchanged. In the end the idolaters themselves grew weary of it and murmurs arose against the outrageous enmities dividing the town. Abu Sofyan seemed to realize that this state of things could not last indefinitely, and also that the persecutions only gained sympathy for the new sect. Hisham ben 'Amr, for his part, urged reconciliation ; he won over Zubair ben Abi Omayya, a descendant of 'Abdelmottalib on his mother's side, as well as several others.

The parchment of the Ka'ba containing the order of eviction was destroyed soon and most opportunely—

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eaten by worms or ruined in some other fashion, so that only the first words, "In thy name, O great God!" remained. The Mussulmans exclaimed at this miracle and the Qoraishites were impressed. Zubair suggested repealing the order.

"How long," said he, "do you intend shutting your brothers off from all communication with yourselves, leaving them to suffer privations when you live in plenty? Annul this unjust and accursed thing!"

"It shall not be!" cried Abu Lahab, at this.

"It shall be!" cut in Zam'a ben el Aswad. "Moreover, many others beside myself have never given their entire assent to it."

"As for me, I have always disapproved of it," continued Abu'l Bakhturi.

The assembly was persuaded and allowed Mahomet and his companions to return to Mecca. It was perhaps at this period that Mahomet was tempted to make certain concessions to the Qoraishites. The Koran (xvii, 75-6) tells us that if God had not strengthened his Prophet he was on the point of going over slightly to the infidels and very nearly yielded to their temptations. But the recurring revelation which fitted in with the circumstances gave renewed courage to the Prophet. What tormented him most was the backwardness which the divine signs evinced. I do not know whether Mahomet believed in the approaching end of the world; it is possible and certain traditions seem to show us that he may have believed himself to be contemporary with Antichrist. Prophet of the end of the world he was, in a sense, but not necessarily in the sense of immediate inheritance at the time. When he declared: "The Hour and I were sent like these two fingers," (showing his index and middle finger), we see that

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Mahomet was essentially the Prophet of the Hour announcing with unprecedented emphasis that his mission was to dwell on the last days of man and the important truth of his Resurrection, most particularly.

For some years Mahomet had laid stress on celestial punishments to his compatriots who had not cared to listen to him ; neither the divine judgment nor the universal judgment at the end of the world manifested itself. The incredulous laughed in the face of this preacher whose apocalyptic threats were never forthcoming. Was it not natural that he sometimes came near to losing confidence ? The Koran said that only God knows the date of the Supreme Hour and that it will come upon us unawares.

Mahomet was obliged to endure his lack of knowledge with resignation and accept the postponement ; he needed continual encouragements from heaven to comfort him. At last, events brought consolation and his success appeared to him like the splendid confirmation of promises and the proof of his divine protection. Now, triumphant, he could laugh at the scoffers while the swords of his faithful shut the mouths of the insolent. Waiting for the end of the world, he established his sovereignty in the world.

In spite of the official repeal of the excommunication, Mahomet's troubles were not yet over. In 620 he lost one after the other Abu Tâlib, his protector, and Khadija, his faithful wife, friend, comforter : This indeed was the Year of Mourning.

Abu Tâlib was over eighty years of age. Mahomet had loved him as a father and despaired at never having been able to convert him to Islam. The death-bed of this old man became the scene of a pathetic struggle. Mahomet begged his uncle to profess the faith and be assured of a blessed resurrection. Abu Tâlib refused

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because he would not have had it said that he was so troubled by a fear of death. Mahomet was untiring, although Abu Jahl and 'Abdallah ben Abi Omayya on the contrary exhorted the dying man not to abandon his ancestors' religion. It was not long before the old man ceased to speak. His attendants bent over his lips but breathing had ceased and Mahomet had the pain of seeing his uncle, adopted father and benefactor die in the abomination of idolatry.

"As long as I am not forbidden," he declared, "I will ask God to pardon him."

But soon afterwards a revelation appeared to him which forbade him to pray for those dying openly in idolatry. Mahomet was forced to submit, but it would seem he was fully assured that Abu Tâlib was the least ill-treated of any of the damned in consideration of all his services to Islam ; that he was only up to his ankles in hell and that its fires would mount no further than his spinal bulb.

After the death of his protector the persecutions against Mahomet were redoubled. One day a man threw dust into his face and Fâtima, his daughter, washed him and wept.

"O my daughter," said he, "do not weep. God will help me."

The death of Khadija took from him the person who first understood him—the person who had never failed to give him the sweetest consolation and the tenderest admiration. The Angel Gabriel assured him that Khadija possessed a palace of silver in paradise. Although she was sixty years of age, Mahomet had never dreamed of taking another wife but remained stubbornly faithful to her.

When he decided to re-marry, he chose 'Aîsha, the young daughter of his faithful adherent, Abu Bakr.

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‘Aïsha promised to be a beauty although she was but seven years old. The betrothal only was solemnized and the marriage not consummated until two years later at Medina, when ‘Aïsha became the Prophet’s favourite wife besides being the only woman to enter his bed as a virgin. In the meanwhile, Mahomet married Sawda, the widow of Sakrân ben ‘Amr, one of the emigrants returned from Abyssinia and deceased at Mecca not long after. Although this marriage gave her a certain position, Mahomet never loved her very much, so it seems.

For some time he had been looking for a method of relieving his situation ; to remain indefinitely in Mecca was to consume himself in useless effort. But what other town, what other tribe, would give him protection and adhere to his faith ? He fixed his mind on Taïf, the charming city of the Thaqifites, seventy-two miles from Mecca towards the east in the cool mountains where fruit trees grew—peach, plum and pomegranate—unknown in the others parts of Arabia. Taïf, unfortunately, was not only renowned for its raisins and healthy climate for which the wealthy of Mecca adopted it as summer resort but was, as well, the centre of worship of El Lât, one of God’s daughters, and possessed a statue of this goddess greatly venerated by the Thaqifites. For a month the Prophet sojourned unsuccessfully in this town, exposed to insults and sometimes the assaults of the populace.

“ If God had wanted to send a prophet,” one of them said to him, “ could he not have chosen a better one than you ? ”

Children and street-loungers shouted ironically at him ; people threw stones at him ; hostile crowds surrounded him. He sought shelter in a corner, in the shadow of a wall of a house where lived Shaïba

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and 'Otba at this time of year, the two sons of Rabi'a the Qoraishite, The people withdrew and the unfortunate Prophet was left alone at the foot of a vine growing on the wall. From a window the two brothers watched him while he lamented to God.

"I seek refuge in you, O my God, against my weakness and my want of power. You are the God of the weak. You are my Saviour and my God. Are you abandoning me to strangers, to my enemies ? I fear nothing unless I am the object of your anger. I take refuge in the light of your countenance which strengthens this world and the world beyond. In you only exist power and aid."

Much affected at hearing him pray in this manner, the two brothers sent one of their slaves, Addas, with a bunch of grapes for him. Addas, being a Christian, noticed that Mahomet said : *Bismillah, "In God's name,"* before eating.

"The people do not say that in this country," he said.

"What is your land and your religion, then ?" said Mahomet.

"I am a Christian of Nineveh."

"That is the city of Jonah, the Prophet."

"How did you come to hear of Jonah ?"

"He was a Prophet, as I am."

In finding a sort of fellow-believer in this idolatrous country, the Christian slave was moved ; he threw himself at Mahomet's feet, kissing his shoulders and hands. The two brothers were watching the scene from a distance.

"See ! He has won over your slave," said Shaïba to 'Otba. And when the man came in he reproved him for his attitude.

"Be careful ; this man will dissuade you from your own religion which is worth more than his."

## THE YEAR OF MOURNING

Mahomet was driven out of Taïf by the inhabitants who followed him with their insults to a certain distance outside the walls. He willingly would have returned to Mecca but not without the certainty of a patron. Zaid, so attached to him that he had come with Mahomet, looked for someone to play this rôle. El Akhnas ben Sharif and Sohaïl ben 'Amr, were sounded first and either could not or would not accept it. At Nakhla, Mahomet waited to hear the result of their negotiations, praying to God in his desperation not to blame him for the ill-success of his preachings amongst the Thaqifites.

One night while praying and reciting from the Koran under a palm-tree in a solitary spot, he was overheard by a company of *jinns*. "Listen ! Listen !" said these spirits with bodies of fire, but mortal like man ; although their spans are much longer, they are destined like him to a future life of reward or punishment according to their deserts. Enticed by the beauty of the verses, these mysterious beings were converted to Islam, relates the 72nd sura of the Koran, in which the Prophet informs us of this astonishing adventure. At least the spiritual forces were with him if men drove him off. The *jinns*, whom the Arabs worshipped so superstitiously, were actually converted. What were the idolaters to think of this ?

At last, El Mut'im ben 'Adi agreed to take Mahomet under his protection and the Prophet was able to return to Mecca. The markets were in season and he was to be found in them preaching with the hope of gaining the support of a number of tribes. The Banu Hanifa refused to listen to him. The Banu 'Amir might perhaps have been led by him but with the sole and worldly aim of possibly governing the country through him. He refused

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to allow himself to be utilized for political purposes.

At this same period the Prophet had the famous vision known as the Nocturnal Ascension, which has given rise to so many commentaries. In the middle of a solemn, quiet night when even the nightbirds and the rambling beasts were quiet, when the streams had stopped murmuring and no breezes played, Mahomet was awakened by a voice crying : "Sleeper, awake !" And before him stood the Angel Gabriel with radiant forehead, countenance white as snow, floating blond hair, in garments sewn with pearls and embroidered in gold. Manifold wings of every colour stood out quivering from his body.

He led a fantastical steed, Borâq, "Lightning," with a human head and two eagles' wings ; it approached Mahomet, allowed him to mount and was off like an arrow over the mountains of Mecca and the sands of the desert towards the North . . . The Angel accompanied them on this prodigious flight. On the summit of Mt. Sinai, where God had spoken to Moses, Gabriel stopped Mahomet for prayer, and again at Bethlehem where Jesus was born, before resuming their course in the air. Mysterious voices attempted to detain the Prophet, who was so wrapped up in his mission that he felt God alone had the right to stop his steed. When they reached Jerusalem Mahomet tethered Borâq and prayed on the ruins of the Temple of Solomon with Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Seeing an endless ladder appear upon Jacob's rock, the Prophet was enabled to mount rapidly to the heavens.

The first heaven was of pure silver and the stars suspended from its vault by chains of gold ; in each one an angel lay awake to prevent the demons from

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climbing into the holy dwelling-places and the spirits from listening indiscreetly to celestial secrets. There, Mahomet greeted Adam. And in the six other heavens the Prophet met Noah, Aaron, Moses, Abraham, David, Solomon, Idris (Enoch), Yahya (John the Baptist) and Jesus. He saw the Angel of Death, Azrail, so huge that his eyes were separated by 70,000 marching days. He commanded 100,000 battalions and passed his time in writing in an immense book the names of those dying or being born. He saw the Angel of Tears who wept for the sins of the world ; the Angel of Vengeance with brazen face, covered with warts, who presides over the element of fire and sits on a throne of flames ; and another immense angel made up half of snow and half of fire surrounded by a heavenly choir continually crying : “ O God, Thou hast united snow and fire, united all Thy servants in obedience to Thy Laws.” In the seventh heaven where the souls of the just resided was an angel larger than the entire world, with 70,000 heads ; each head had 70,000 mouths, each mouth had 70,000 tongues and each tongue spoke in 70,000 different idioms singing endlessly the praises of the Most High.

While contemplating this extraordinary being, Mahomet was carried to the top of the Lote-Tree of Heaven flowering at the right of God’s invisible throne and shading myriads of angelic spirits. Then after having crossed in a twinkling of an eye the widest seas, regions of dazzling light and deepest darkness, traversed millions of clouds of hyacinths, of gauze, of shadows, of fire, of air, of water, of void, each one separated by 500 marching years, he then passed more clouds—of beauty, of perfection, of supremacy, of immensity, of unity, behind which were 70,000

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choirs of angels bowed down and motionless in complete silence. The earth began to heave and he felt himself carried into the light of his Lord, where he was transfixed, paralysed. From here heaven and earth combined appeared as if imperceptible to him, as if melted into nothingness and reduced to the size of a grain of mustard-seed in the middle of a field. And this is how Mahomet admits having been before the Throne of the Lord of the World.

He was in the presence of the Throne "*at a distance of two bows' length or yet nearer*" (Koran liii), beholding God with his soul's eyes and seeing things which the tongue cannot express, surpassing all human understanding. The Almighty placed one hand on Mahomet's breast and the other on his shoulder—to the very marrow of his bones he felt an icy chill, followed by an inexpressible feeling of calm and ecstatic annihilation.<sup>1</sup>

After a conversation whose ineffability is not honoured by too precise tradition, the Prophet received the command from God that all believers must say fifty prayers each day. Upon coming down from heaven Mahomet met Moses, who spoke with him on this subject :

" How do you hope to make your followers say fifty prayers each day ? I had experience with mankind

<sup>1</sup> Mohammad was . . . suspended at the furthest limit of creation. . . . His gaze, detached for the moment from human beings . . . was directly absorbed by an infinite Being so incomprehensible that he had to admit himself powerless to praise him worthily. This simple, negative vision definitely clarified his faith, giving him *sakinah*, without uniting with God ; his mission was to extol the Judge who isolates his divinity from all human beings as Moses extolled the Law-Giver, and Jesus the Spirit which united humanity with God.—(Cf. L. Massignon, *Al-Hallaj, martyr mystique de l'islam*, Paris, 1922, p. 743.)

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before you. I tried everything with the children of Israel that it was possible to try. Take my word, return to our Lord and ask for a reduction."

Mahomet returned, and the number of prayers was reduced to forty. Moses thought that this was still too many and made his successor go back to God a number of times. In the end God exacted not more than five prayers.

Gabriel then took the Prophet to paradise where the faithful rejoice after their resurrection—an immense garden with silver soil, gravel of pearls, mountains of amber, filled with golden palaces and precious stones.

Finally, after returning by the luminous ladder to the earth, Mahomet untethered Borâq, mounted the saddle and rode into Jerusalem on the winged steed.

It has been discussed at length whether the Nocturnal Ascension of the Prophet was made in the flesh or in the spirit. It is asserted that he saw real caravans on the road between Jerusalem and Mecca whose approaching arrivals he was able to presage. Furthermore, he found his way back to his room in time to pick up a jar, which stood beside his bed and which the angel had upset with his wing on his departure, before all the water had flowed out of it. Legend even relates that the Patriarch of Jerusalem saw traces of the Prophet's visit in the temple the following day. Many embrace the opinion that the trip to Jerusalem both ways on Borâq actually happened and that the ascent to heaven took place only in the spirit. These discussions, filling volumes, seem rather trifling, and there is no means of distinguishing the Nocturnal Ascension from other visions of Prophets and mystics, either authentic or not. What is

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interesting is the attempt at spiritual meditation which many Mussulman mystics have made using this theme as a base.

The following day when Mahomet told the happening to his uncle, El 'Abbas, and his cousin Omm Hâni, they advised him to speak to no one about it ; his very friends would not have been able to believe such a tale and his adversaries would have used it to make him ridiculous. The Prophet believed, however, that it was his duty to make known all that had been revealed to him. He seated himself in the square of the Ka'ba. Abu Jahl, happening to pass, asked him if he had any news and Mahomet told him that he had passed the night at Jerusalem.

" And are you already back ? " laughed Abu Jahl calling the passers-by to come and listen to this comic tale.

Mahomet told them the story of his night, describing the Temple of Jerusalem and the inhabitants of the seven heavens. Abraham resembled himself, he said, although he was a giant. Moses was dark with slightly wavy hair. Jesus was of medium height and strength with a pink and white complexion and straight hair.

" As for John, Zacharias's son, he is a little thick-set man, with red hair looking as if it had been burnt by the sun. He looks like you, Abu Jahl, and like you too, O Maktam, son of Abu'l Hur . . . "

Most of those present, including the most kindly disposed to Mahomet, did not know what to think and raised their hands to their brows in gestures of astonishment. Certain amongst them accused him of being a liar or a madman ; and several even of those most devoted to him were shaken in their devotion.

They went to tell Abu Bakr about it.

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“Did the Messenger of God tell you that?” said he.

“Yes.”

“Well,” said he, “then it is true.”

Abu Bakr’s attitude confirmed several of the undecided, and Mahomet, out of gratitude for the unshakeable faith of his friend, gave him the nickname of *es Seddiq*, the Veracious.



**PART II**

**MEDINA**



## CHAPTER XI

### THE HEGIRA (622)

*An action must be judged by its intention. The emigration of him who goes forth to obtain material advantages or to find a wife shall count only for the worth of the intention which prompted the journey.*

Mahomet (Bokhari, i).

*Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.*

St. Luke xviii, 28-30.

ON the desert plain of 'Aqaba of Mina at the foot of a forbidding mountain the pilgrims of Yathrib performed the thousand-year-old magic rite of throwing stones against a small column ; then, night having come on, they went into their tents and slept. The victims had been sacrificed and the pilgrimage was over.

Not all of them, however, really slept. Just before midnight seventy-five of them arose noiselessly

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and went towards the plain of 'Aqaba, seating themselves on the rocks to wait in silence. It was a solemn and decisive moment. Doubtless, these men did not realize that this midnight gathering marked a turning-point in the history of the world ; yet they did realize the gravity of their act. These were the Mussulmans of Yathrib converted by Mus'ab ben 'Omair and a secret meeting with the Prophet had been arranged.

The year before (621) in the same spot and under similar conditions Mahomet had met twelve pilgrims from Yathrib who took an oath, in their own names and in those of their absent wives, to associate no other creature with God, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to kill their children even though they found themselves too poor to nourish them, not to slander, and to obey the Prophet in all things just.

These Arabs of Yathrib, accustomed to the monotheistic idea through association with their Jewish allies, now wondered whether this extraordinary man was not the Prophet so often spoken of by the children of Israel, whose coming was to announce the end of the world. In that case, it were better to adhere to him from the first. Some of them, however, hoped that his coming to Yathrib would bring peace to the city, long torn by a ruinous civil war between the rival tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj.

These circumstances shaped the destiny of Mahomet. For more than ten years he had preached in vain to his fellow-townsmen. After having sacrificed his comfort, his fortune and his peace of mind, Mahomet reached middle age without any dream of retiring in peace and tranquillity ; on the contrary, he was ready to make new sacrifices. Spurred on by

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unexpected support, he began to think of exiling himself and so embark on the great adventure. The people of Yathrib would give him, perhaps, the support he had failed to find either amongst his own people or those of Taïf.

It was midnight. Several men draped in white climbed the slope—Mahomet and the Mussulmans of Mecca. Mahomet addressed a pathetic speech to the converts of Yathrib and recited from the Koran. He implored them to worship openly the true God and to follow him, God's Prophet, through both good and evil fortune, to give to the faithful of Mecca the same protection they would afford to their own wives and children.

"Yes," called forth one of them named El Barra', "in the name of Him who sent you with the Truth, we shall defend you and yours as we would our own wives and children. We have inherited courage from our ancestors."

"We agree to march under your banner, O Messenger of God," said Abu'l Haïtham, "but what proof will you give us that you will remain for ever with us, that you will not some day return to your own countrymen?"

"Your blood shall be my blood and your cause shall be my cause," replied Mahomet. "Henceforth you belong to me and I belong to you. Your enemies shall be my enemies and I shall be the friend of your friends."

The gathering then declared itself satisfied and willing to take oath. Then the Khazrajite El 'Abbas ben 'Obada addressed his countrymen with these words :

"Do you fully realize what you are doing when you swear allegiance to this man? For you must know

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all that you commit yourselves to. It means that you must follow him in battle against the red man and the black man—against the whole world ; if you are not prepared to follow him to the very end, if one day you are to abandon him finding the task too heavy, it would be far better to do so to-day. But if you feel that you are sure to remain faithful, though it cost you all your possessions and your chiefs, then take the oath ; it will be advantageous to you in both worlds.”

“ We solemnly promise ! We shall follow him always ! ” they cried. ‘ But, O Messenger of God, what will be our reward if we die for you ? ”

“ Paradise ! ” answered Mahomet.

“ Give us your hand.”

He stretched his hand towards them and they all swore faith unto him. El Barra’ was the first to touch his hand ; when all of them, including two women, had done the same, El ‘Abbas ben ‘Obada said to Mahomet :—

“ In the name of Him who sent you to us with the Truth, to-morrow, if you wish it, we will attack the idolaters of Mina ! ”

“ I have not received such an order from God,” replied Mahomet. “ Return in peace.”

It was at this taking of the oath for the second time at ‘Aqaba, known as the “ the men’s oath ” (the oath of the previous year was known as “ the women’s oath ”), that the principle of the holy war was proposed for the first time. Until then, God had not permitted his Prophet to draw the sword ; for the Koran contained only exhortations of patience. During thirteen years Mahomet and his followers had answered persecution by gentleness and forgiveness. Henceforth, the Mussulmans were permitted to render blow

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for blow, but only when the specific order came from on high.

As the gathering was dispersing, the conspirators heard a mysterious, threatening voice coming from behind the rocks of Mina. This strange cry in the night troubled them greatly, but Mahomet (they say) declared it to be the voice of the demon, from whom they had nothing to fear, telling them to enter their tents and sleep peacefully. Could the mysterious voice have been a spy sent by the Qoraishites ?

Mahomet ordered his followers to go to Yathrib in small groups. About a hundred men and women thus exiled themselves and the Prophet remained with 'Ali and Abu Bakr although the latter also wanted to go to Yathrib.

" Do not be impatient," said Mahomet, " Wait for me, for I, too, soon hope to be authorized (by God) to emigrate."

" Really ! You expect that ? " exclaimed Abu Bakr in great joy. " I would give my father and my mother to redeem you ! "

Abu Bakr therefore made arrangements to take flight at the same time as his friend ; and held in readiness two swift she-camels that had been fed for four months on the leaves of the *samora*.

Mahomet came to his house every evening, but one day he arrived at noon.

" Something serious has happened," Abu Bakr said to himself.

" Make everyone leave who is under your roof," Mahomet whispered.

" Only my two daughters, 'Aïsha and Asma, are here."

" Very well, I have just received the authorization to leave."

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“Then I shall accompany you, O Messenger of God !”

“You may accompany me.”

All had been carefully prepared. Had the Qorashites known of Mahomet’s attempt to leave, they might have killed him. The story goes that ‘Ali lay in Mahomet’s bed wrapped in the Prophet’s green cloak, well-known to everyone. The Prophet then went to Abu Bakr’s house and they fled together. For three days and three nights they hid in a cave on Mt. Thawr three miles from Mecca to the south-west, on the other side from the road to Yathrib.

The time was past for patiently bearing persecution, for turning the other cheek. Islam must either conquer or die. Other prophets had come and had performed miracles but the people had put them to death or held them in derision. Mahomet performed no miracles ; neither did he intend to allow himself to be put to death. He had tried gentle persuasion, he had borne every manner of persecution, he had been spared nothing. Now, the last one, he must fly with Abu Bakr, hiding under his cloak the flickering flame of the new faith. Other prophets had come with miracles and holy words. Now Mahomet had come with the sword.

A new life had begun for him. Hereafter he must be a general and the chief of a state. Without ceasing to be an inspired prophet declaiming the suras, he must be a political leader. Perhaps at times he looked back on the past with longing. Perhaps in the midst of harsh realities that destroyed his dream, in the midst of the ebb and flow of earthly matters, he longed for the days spent in the exaltation of solitary meditation in the cave on Mt. Hira, the days when he preached in secret to Khadija, ‘Ali and Zaid, the days when he

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cried aloud in the Ka'ba that there was but one living God.

And so, too, perhaps in the midst of the voluptuous pleasures of the harem amongst his nine wives, some selected for love and others for political reasons, he longed for the pure joys of his fireside with the gentle Khadija. A new life indeed . . .

At this moment he was taking away with him the germ of salvation rejected by his fellow-citizens, the seed which later must be preserved beneath a dome of steel ; for paradise lies in the shadow of the sword. With his faith, he fled from the midnight treachery of his countrymen. The pale moon lengthened their two shadows on the sand. Could they escape the pursuit of an entire city, the pursuit of those Arabs so skilful in detecting traces ? They hid in the cave.

Abu Bakr was a man of fifty. He was rather thin, a little bent, with high forehead and thin face. His brilliant, black eyes were deep-set ; the veins stood out on his bony hands—as well cared for as those of a rich merchant. But to-day he found no time to dye his beard with henna.

Abu Bakr left most of his riches in Mecca, taking with him only 5,000 derhems. His eldest son, 'Abderrahman, the erotic poet, was violently opposed to Islam and severely condemned what he considered a streak of madness in his father. 'Abdallah, his other son, was devoted, however. He passed the night with them, then returned to Mecca before dawn to hear what was being said during the day before going back to the kindly shadows again. His alert, subtle intelligence could be relied on. Asma, his sister, likewise came in the evening. 'Amir ben Fohaira, one of Abu Bakr's freedmen, pretending to lead his flock to pasture, came each morning to awaken the

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fugitives, leaving them a roasted sheep and a milk-giving ewe. The days passed anxiously. The two men drank fresh milk and heated what remained on the rocks to keep it from turning. The Qoraishites searched the entire countryside. Mahomet, rigid as a stretched bow, prayed ; quicker than the flight of an arrow his prayer mounted to the one Being without whom no creature can exist, without whom the mountains would collapse, the stars crumble into dust, the light of the sun go out, and all souls perish.

Abu Bakr was on guard. He heard voices. Armed men, mounted on swift camels, kept watch on all sides. They met a shepherd, questioned him, and Abu Bakr could hear their words distinctly.

“Perhaps,” said the man, “they are in that cave. I have seen no one, but it is possible to hide there.”

Abu Bakr was in a cold sweat—an anxiety, almost voluptuous, to hide himself, to become motionless, breathless, a passive instrument in the hands of fate. He touched Mahomet’s shoulder. Mahomet did not stir ; the cave was marvellously calm and cool and dark, a sphere of shade in the midst of the hostile heat of the burning desert.

“Fear nothing, God will protect us,” he said simply.

The men having searched the vicinity approached the cave. They climbed the mountain-side to the entrance which was rather wide, although from the outside nothing but a very small hole was visible. Several of the Qoraishites had by now reached the opening. The men in hiding heard their footsteps above them.

“If one of them should happen to look down,” said Abu Bakr, “he would see us.”

“O, Abu Bakr, what do you think can befall two men who have God as a third companion ?”

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The Qoraishites were near the entrance of the cave. Mahomet prayed.

It was then that the miracle happened—a harmony of the soul of man and the outer world. In the arid crack of the rock, a mountain shrub had sprouted. It seemed suddenly to grow ; its branches gripped the rocks ; its graceful tendrils stood up in the air until almost all of the cave entrance was covered. In its shadow, a dove lay cooing. And a spider, performing its daily miracle, spread the intricate, geometrical pattern of its web. Between the light of the outside and the cool darkness of the cave extended the delicate threads at the end of which the spider balanced himself, climbed up, descended, and finally came to rest in the middle, lying in wait for his victim. And the white dove—the bird of love—laid her eggs in the sand. The male fluttered about her there at the entrance of the cave, their home. What joy on the earth, what love and peace in this tiny corner of the world !

These three things are the only miracles recorded in authentic Mussulman history : the web of a spider, the love of a dove, the sprouting of a flower—three miracles accomplished daily on God's earth.

“ Let us go into the cave,” said one of the pursuers.

“ Oh, no,” said Omayya ben Khalaf, “ there is nothing in there but spiders’ webs older than Mahomet himself.”

Abu Bakr flattened himself against the wall in the farthest corner of the cave. The Qoraishites looked into the dark hole. They saw the dove but did not want to crush her eggs. They saw the bush and the spider’s web, and shook their heads, convinced that no one had entered the cave lately. Several of them, after their long ride, loitered to answer a call of nature.

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“They have seen us,” said Abu Bakr to his companion.

“No, had they believed us to be here, they would have conducted themselves more decently.”

Finally the pursuers departed. The two listeners heard their cries to each other and the footsteps of their horses as they turned homewards.

“Glory to God!” cried Mahomet. “God is indeed greatest!”

On the eve of the third day, Asma and ‘Amir ben Fohaira, accompanied by ‘Abdallah ben Arqat, a polytheist Bedouin guide, in whom, however, Abu Bakr had complete confidence, arrived at the cave with two camels and provisions for the voyage. Asma occupied herself with arranging the provisions. As she could find nothing with which to tie her father’s bag and the gourd, she took off her belt, cutting it into two strips to use as cords; hence, she has been called “the woman with the two belts.” A whole sheep, roasted in the ashes, was wrapped in the round piece of leather that served for a table cloth.

Mahomet and Abu Bakr mounted and set off, accompanied by the guide and ‘Amir on foot. Wishing to avoid the chief route, they went diagonally in a northerly direction, along the borders of the Red Sea. They travelled all that night and part of the next morning without stopping. In order to encourage the camels, the guide sang to them in a monotonous chant tuned to the rhythm of their footsteps.

When the heat became intense and the route was completely deserted, they stopped at the foot of a great rock casting a cool shadow on a small patch of ground never reached by the sun. Abu Bakr spread a fur upon which his friend, worn out by fatigue and thirst, might rest. A shepherd with several sheep

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came to repose in the shade. Abu Bakr asked him to milk one of his ewes, bidding him remove all hairs and dust from the udder. Then pouring some water from his leather bottle into the milk to cool it, he offered the bowl to the Prophet.

“ Is it not time to set forth again ? ” asked Mahomet.

“ Yes, the sun is beginning to go down.”

The Qoraishites, however, had offered a reward of a hundred camels to anyone who would bring back Mahomet, dead or alive. All the neighbouring tribes were warned. Soraqa ben Malik, a Bedouin of the Madbah tribe, resolved to gain the reward. One of his tribesman pointed out some dark shapes going in the direction of the coast.

“ These must be So-and-so and So-and-so gone in search of straying camels,” he said, wishing secretly to take advantage of the knowledge, and he remained several minutes in the group to divert their attention ; but going home, he sent a servant to post a horse behind a sand dune and slipped out of the rear end of his tent, armed from head to foot.

Soon he almost caught up with the Prophet and his companions. He could hear the Prophet reciting from the Koran. The fugitives were unarmed. Abu Bakr, turning his head, realized that he would soon be at their side, and manifested his uneasiness to the Prophet. But a strange fear suddenly came over Soraqa ; his horse slipped, or stumbled against a stone. Mahomet, seeing his distress, addressed him in eloquent words, and the Bedouin, who was in an awkward position and also greatly impressed, begged the four men to spare him and to intercede with heaven in his favour.

Then he turned homewards and covered up the

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flight of the Prophet by saying to those he met on the way :

“ I am taking charge of the pursuit on this side. You go the other way.”

Being a canny Bedouin, however, he had asked Mahomet to make a mark on his quiver in testimony of their meeting. Years later, after Islam had triumphed, he made good use of this.

The fugitives continued their path towards Yathrib. They crossed the dunes, where the vegetation had begun to dry up under the summer sun, the hills, of a muddy yellow or a dull blue, were dotted with little trees, whose leaves were eaten in times of scarcity ; they then passed a volcanic region where the desert takes on a tragic aspect with its plains of black lava and its mountains of old craters spotted with blue basalt, rose porphyry and silvery soapstone. The farther north they went, the more scarce water became. Little springs surrounded by palm-trees, open wells of yellowish water along the trail or natural cisterns in the hollows of the rocks were all that could be found. The region was inhabited by nomads with a few permanent inhabitants living in miserable villages of mud houses covered with tiles of lava.

After seven days of travel, they approached Yathrib. Already they had come upon the great *kasbas* of the tribes living in the suburbs and they could hear the doves cooing to each other in the towers. The fugitives were beyond all danger. The Banu Sahm tribe, headed by its Sheikh, Boraïda, came forth to meet the Prophet. Ez Zubair, Asma's husband, was at the head of a caravan coming from Syria which had crossed them on their route. He had furnished them with new white garments.

At last, on a Monday, the 12th Rabi‘, they reached

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Quba, two miles from Yathrib, where they were joined by 'Ali, who arrived in a pitiful state, having made the trip on foot, travelling by night and hiding by day. Quba was a village on a fertile hillside, covered with gardens and vineyards, date, fig, orange and pomegranate trees. The Prophet stayed there four days and laid the foundations of what was perhaps the first mosque. On Friday, after having delivered a long sermon and his first public prayer, Mahomet made a triumphant entry into Yathrib, now Medina, as we have already related.

Several days later, the faithful Zaid, 'Aisha and Asma, the two daughters of Abu Bakr, and the family of the Prophet, arrived. Thus all the Moslems of Mecca, excepting some slaves, some of lukewarm faith, and a few renegades "unfaithful to their own souls", had left their native country. They were called the Emigrants, *Mohajirûn*. The inhabitants of Medina were known as the Aids of the Prophet, the *Ansar*. All were his Companions, *Sahaba*.

Such was the celebrated emigration, the Hegira, from which the Caliph 'Omar dated the Moslem era.

## CHAPTER XII

### MADINAT EN NABI

*The Faith will find a refuge in Medina as the serpent finds a refuge in his hole. . . . Medina disposes of the wicked as the fire of the forge chases the impurities out of iron. . . . The Anti-christ will never enter there, for her seven gates are each guarded by two angels.*

(Bokhari)

ONCE established at Medina Mahomet began to work out the details of his religion (a thing few originators of religions have been able to do) and, at the same time, to found a society on a basis entirely new in Arabia and broader than the exclusive conceptions of tribe and clan before that time. He was at once an apostle, a legislator, a politician and a warrior. Most of the population gave him an enthusiastic welcome, but his authority was not firmly established until after his first great victories.

The conciliation of all factions fell upon him. There were the Jews, numerous and influential, and those Arabs not yet converted to Islam. To the Jews, he made many advances ; when he prayed he faced the direction (*qibla*) of Jerusalem. He won over several rabbis, notably 'Abdallah ben Salam, although most of them cherished a lively opposition to his propaganda.

Now, by virtue of a solemn charter, there were

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united in the same nation all the Mussulman emigrants of Mecca, the converts of Medina, the pagan tribes of the Khazraj and the Aws, and several tribes of local Jews, their allies. All were pledged to mutual aid and to take part in the defence of the city. The Jews were allowed religious freedom and Mussulman protection. When the Mussulmans went to war the Jews were to contribute to the cost. No faction was allowed to declare war or to make alliances without the consent of the Prophet, who was the arbiter of all disputes.

In order to more closely unite the Emigrants of Mecca and the Mussulmans of Medina or the *Ansar*, and to avoid rivalries which might have proved dangerous, Mahomet established a system of personal relationship which was to supersede that of the family. Each *Ansari*, or Mussulman of Medina, took as a brother a *Mohajir*, or Emigrant of Mecca, the rule being that he should stand in the line of inheritance before the members of the natural family. Later, this rule was rescinded. The *Ansar* were very generous with the exiles who, for the most part, were obliged to leave their possessions behind at Mecca. Only 'Othman, the rich Ommayad, a son-in-law of Mahomet's, was able to transport his wealth. As soon as he reached Medina he bought from a Jew for forty thousand dirhems the well of Rawna which he devoted for the common use of the Emigrants. But he still remained so rich that he paid the entire expenses of the expedition against Tabuk, almost unaided.

The others were less fortunate. Hamza asked his nephew to provide him with the necessities of life. 'Abderrahman ben 'Awf arrived without a penny. The *Ansari* Saïd, who had adopted him as a brother,

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offered to share his possessions with him, even to his wives ; but 'Abderrahman only asked the road to the market-place. His confidence in his commercial ability was not misplaced. After beginning humbly by selling butter and cheese, he soon became rich enough to pay the dowry for a wife from Medina and later he equipped a caravan of seven hundred camels. "Underneath each stone," he said, "I believe I can find a treasure." Of another of his disciples, Mahomet said laughingly that he could make a fortune selling sand.

The emigrants of Mecca brought to Medina their customs, their business sense and their love of gain. They established a second *sug*, or market-place, in the heart of the city so as to free themselves from the Jewish domination at the market of the Banu Qaïnoqa.

Others of the Emigrants became tillers of the soil. The people of Medina gave them land to cultivate, taking only a part of the harvest in return, 'Ali Sa'd ben Malik, 'Abdallah ben Mas'ud, the families of Abu Bakr, 'Omar, Ibn Sirin and others, made similar contracts.

Even the well-established Mussulmans led very simple lives. Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter, and her husband, Ez Zubaïr, had but one camel and one horse. They cultivated some land that had been given them at a distance of two-thirds of a *parasang* from their house.<sup>1</sup> Asma herself looked after the horse, drew water with the aid of the camel, mended the leather water bottles, carried the garden produce on her head, and kneaded the bread ; but as she was not skilful enough to make the bread her neighbours in Medina helped her. One day when she was carrying a heavy

<sup>1</sup> A Persian linear measure.

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load on her head she met Mahomet and some of his disciples. He stopped his camel and invited her to ride behind him. With an embarrassed air, the young wife refused, for "her husband was the most jealous of men". But her husband told her that he would have preferred having her ride with his brother-in-law the Prophet than carry a heavy load. At last Abu Bakr gave his daughter a slave to do the heavy work. "It seems to me that I have just been freed," she said.

Abu Bakr and his family occupied a small house in the suburb of Es-Sunh, but his eldest son, the bitter pagan 'Abderrahman, had remained at Mecca. His other son, 'Abdallah, had married the beautiful Atika, daughter of the famous bandit, Zaid ben 'Amr. She likewise emigrated. Her husband loved her with such passion that he neglected to take part in the holy wars, and Abu Bakr forced them to separate for a time.

'Omar likewise inhabited the suburbs. He rose rapidly in Mahomet's esteem and Mahomet did nothing without consulting both 'Omar and Abu Bakr, who were on intimate terms with him ; he received them partly dressed whereas he was far more formal with his Ommayad son-in-law, 'Othman who, after his marriage with Roqaïa, had married the Prophet's other daughter, Omm Kulthum. But the new master of Medina had to exercise diplomacy in his dealings with these two powerful disciples. Even in the matter of the selection of his harem, he consulted these two men of strong character, both of whom felt they were born to command, although of plebian origin.

'Omar, brought up strictly by his father, had had a hard life at the beginning, like the Prophet. He was full of energy and given to violence. Tall, stern,

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with a dark complexion which came from a mulatto mother, he was always seen in public (and at home, they say, in order to terrify his wives) with a bull's-pizzle whip in his hand. One day he used his whip on some people who had come to ask a favour of Mahomet. It was he who caused the wives of Mahomet to be veiled and sequestered ; and even after he became caliph two women refused to marry him saying he was too severe, that he kept his wives locked up, and that he always fed his family upon coarse food—barley bread and camel's meat cooked in salty water. All the anecdotes about him indicate that he was a brutal man. “Cut his head off straightway ! ” was often the advice he gave, whereas Abu Bakr, who could upon occasion be resolute and forceful, was more tempered in his advice. Power and maturity had greatly broadened his spirit.

Mahomet was amused by ‘Omar’s jealousy. One day he told him that in a dream he had gone to paradise, where he stood in front of a castle. He asked the name of the owner.

“‘Omar ben el Khattâb,” was the answer.

“In that case,” said the Prophet, remembering ‘Omar’s jealousy, “I turned my back.”

At these words ‘Omar melted into tears. “Is it of you, O Messenger of God, that I need have jealous fears ? ”

And Mahomet had to console him.

Mahomet advised the *Mohajirunn* to work for their livings rather than accept the charity of the *Ansar*. And some of them worked so hard that they became evil-smelling from toil, which offended the delicate nostrils of ‘Aisha. But some Arabs who had come from afar, poor uncultivated devils, did not seem to be able to look out for themselves and were obliged

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to live on charity. The Prophet found a place for them to sleep on a bench in a part of the mosque that was covered by a roof but had no walls ; hence the name of *ahl es suffa*, the “people of the bench”. He gave them, when he could, the remains from his own table. Sometimes in the evening they were fed with a mess of roasted barley bought with the community’s money. In their tatters they added a picturesque note to the Prophet’s court. Of all of them the most curious was Abu Horaïra, known as the “old man with the little cat”, probably because he nearly always carried a cat around with him. This sympathetic vagabond came from the tribe of Dawsites. “I would never have thought that such a decent fellow was to be found amongst the Dawsites,” said Mahomet, upon learning of his origin.

Abu Horaïra is known for the great number of suspicious *hadîths* which he collected. He followed the Prophet everywhere, even to his intimate retreats, recording his least word and humblest action. This genial parasite, it seems, preferred the holy company of his master and the teachings that came from his lips to any sort of work. When he suffered from hunger, he would lay a stone on his belly and ask someone to recite the Koran to him—simply a way of asking to be invited to a meal. One day when he was literally famished, he met ‘Omar.

“Take me to your house so that I can hear you read the Koran,” he said.

‘Omar invited him to come, read several verses but gave him nothing. The poor man complained to the Prophet, who gave him milk to drink, and he drank until his stomach was as tight as a drum.

But Ja‘far ben Abi Tâlib, Mahomet’s cousin, was more generous to the “old man with the little cat”,

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as well as to other famished "people of the bench". He would take them to his house and give them everything he had. When there remained nothing but a water jug he would burst it open so that they could lick the inside. Some hungry Bedouins received amongst "the people of the bench" were allowed by the Prophet to drink the milk and the urine (sic) of the camels of the tithe. But they killed the driver and made off with the animals. When they were caught Mahomet punished them by having their hands and feet cut off, their eyes poked out and abandoning them in the desert where they died, gnawing the stones.

Life was not always easy in Medina, as can be seen. Mahomet, after having occupied the first floor of Abu Ayyub's house, established himself near the mosque. He had bought the ground where his camel first knelt, seen to the removal of some palm-trees and tombs and, with his own hands, began the construction of the House of Prayer. To be sure, it was nothing but a large square, bounded on the one side by the brick houses with stone doorways of the Prophet and his wives, and on the other by the covered gallery of the "people of the bench", supported by the trunks of palm-trees. The only lighting at night was that given by little heaps of straws illuminated for the evening prayer. Nine years later lamps were attached to the tree trunks.

The Prophet preached with his back against a tree-trunk. Later he had made a pulpit of tamarisk wood (*minbar*)—a sort of stool with three steps. He stood on one of the steps of this platform, at once chair, pulpit and throne, holding in his hand a small javelin or wand inlaid with gold and ivory with which he would emphasise certain parts of his discourse.

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The negro, Bilal, who had been bought out of slavery by Abu Bakr became the muezzin and master of ceremonies of the Prophet. He stood at the foot of the platform holding in his hand the ceremonial sword with its hilt of silver. It was not until the end of his life, after his great victories when he was the powerful head of a state, that Mahomet adopted the following ceremony to impress the Arabs. He then had several pulpits made and on Fridays he would have the mosque perfumed by burning precious essences. A great, red tent of leather, large enough to accommodate forty persons, was sometimes set up in the square for the reception of deputations.

Mahomet's house bordered the mosque. He had an apartment for each of his wives, with the doors giving on to the courtyard of prayer. The first houses were those of Sawda and 'Aïsha. There were as many as nine at a time. Sawda had been married in Mecca shortly before the Hegira. 'Aïsha was married to the Prophet eight months after his arrival in Medina. She was then nine years of age.

One day when she was amusing herself in the swings with her little friends, her mother, Abu Bakr's wife, called to her. Without understanding at all what it was about, she ran to her mother, out of breath. Her mother took her hand, made her rest on the doorstep until she was calm, wiped the perspiration from her brow and sprinkled her head and face with water. In the house, a gathering of women greeted the child with : "To your happiness ; blessings and the best of fortune !" Then they dressed her. Mahomet arrived. They gave him the tiny, blushing bride.

'Aïsha was Mahomet's favourite wife, and he was very indulgent with her childishness. She was

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intelligent, gracious, but coquettish and capricious ; she soon had a great deal of influence over Mahomet. Her influence in the first half-century of the history of Islam was not always for good. But at that time she was only a lively and happy little girl, in whom the woman was already born. She played with innumerable dolls ; and although her husband had certain puritanical prejudices, he seems to have tolerated the pretty, foreign hangings with figures of winged horses and black eagles and fantastic animals which decorated her walls. When these profane images stood between him and the *qibla* of his prayer, he had them removed so as not to distract his mind. Sometimes he asked her to have the large hangings cut up and made into cushions, for as such they were less shocking. "At the last judgment," he is reported to have said, "God will call up these artists to breathe life into these creatures they have created, which would greatly perplex them."

The victories, the raiding expeditions, and the caravans created a certain luxury, altogether relative, to be sure. (A bodice, costing five dirhems—about three French francs—was the pride of 'Aisha.) There were stuffs and carpets, products of civilization, which gave naïve delight to the sensuous Arabs, who loved magnificence even in the midst of their poverty ; but nothing in the world could prevent the desert Hijaz region from long periods of want. The usual rations of Mahomet and his family were more than frugal. The principal meal was composed chiefly of a boiled gruel known as *sawiq*—flour or roasted barley with dates and water or milk, while the second meal was only dates. There were no strainers for separating the chaff from the wheat. When the barley was being ground, they blew away part of the bran

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with their breath, of which they made a porridge called *khazira* or else they mixed it with milk and honey to make *telbina*, with which to cover the *therid*, or crumbled bread in a soup of meat and vegetables. White bread was almost unknown. Often they lived on water, milk and dates. They sat on the floor on mats and usually there was no napkin on which to wipe their fingers other than their biceps or feet. Several times Mahomet actually suffered from hunger, and one time had to pawn his coat of mail, not having even a measure of barley in the house.

They made up for the days of scarcity, however, after the harvest, after a *razzia*, and when the caravans arrived. An Arab's stomach is capable of supporting the most copious repasts from time to time as well as enduring periods of extreme leanness. Mahomet was often invited to feasts ; he was particularly fond of shoulder of mutton, of gourds floating in a deep sauce, of honey and of sweet dishes. He refused to eat roasted lizards as did the Bedouins of Nejd. He believed in frugality, and that the stomach need only be half-filled ; he forbade eating while lying on the side. This practice meant too long a sojourn at table.

At the beginning of his career the Prophet's wardrobe was no richer than his table. One day a woman gave him a cloak, which he needed badly, but when some one asked him for the cloak to make a shroud, Mahomet gave it up for "he could refuse nothing". His usual garb was a *qamis*, a tunic with sleeves worn next to the skin and a *rida* or *kisa*, a large piece of unsewn goods worn draped about the shoulders. These materials were of rough wool or cotton or of linen. On special occasions he wore garments that were more ornate, embroidered or striped materials that came from Yemen and even,

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towards the end, silken tunics from Damascus and Smyrna, a huge cloak trimmed with gold brought by Khalid ben el Walid, garments with conventional designs given by the monks and Christians of Nejran or bought in Syria or Egypt. He owned, they say, a garment which was worth the price of three hundred camels and that he wore but a single time. In general, however, he forbade the wearing of silks and materials too gay with stripes. A certain amount of parade may go very well with even the most austere of daily existences.

Upon his feet he wore, ordinarily, leather sandals but often went barefoot. The Negus of Abyssinia sent him some trousers and black boots. Several times he wore the boots while praying but he never put on the trousers. On his head he wore a turban ; he needed a mirror to wind it about his head ; a pail of clear water served the purpose.

Mahomet loved above all else, he said, "perfumes, women and prayer". He anointed his head with essences which dripped upon his clothing to such an extent that "one would have taken him for an oil-merchant". His hair and beard were smeared with cosmetics and the stuff that lined his turban was greasy with it. At night people could tell where Mahomet had passed for he left a trail of perfume in his wake. He permitted the wearing of false teeth (one of the disciples had a nose made of gold, upon Mahomet's recommendation) but wigs were strictly forbidden. Mahomet dyed his nails with henna and put kohl on his eyelashes. Before going to bed he cleaned his teeth with a particular kind of wood. He slept upon a carpet or a mattress of leather stuffed with fibres of the palm-tree, which he shook very thoroughly in order to drive out the vermin, for Mahomet was meticulously clean.

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His chief extravagance was his stable. The horse was then a rare animal in Arabia. His white mule called "Doldol", a present from the governor of Egypt, was the first imported into Arabia. He later owned another, a grey one, "Shahba", a present from the Negus. These two rulers also sent him two splendid asses, "Ya'fur" and "Ofair". The Prophet likewise had three racing camels : "Qoswa", bought from Abu Bakr the day of the Hegira, "Jad'a" of the split ears and "Adhba". He had twenty milch-camels, six of which were led to pasture daily and ten of which remained before the doors of Mahomet's wives who had them milked by their servants. His possessions included several dromedaries, herded by the negro Yasar, and seven goats under the care of Omm Aiman.

Mahomet realized the necessity of having a force of cavalry. After the battle of Ohod, he established breeding stables. Sometimes there were horse-races. Mahomet liked racing on his camel, 'Adhba, almost invincible. Once, however, an Arab, mounted on a young camel, beat him in a race. Although this was a terrible blow to the vanity of the Mussulmans, Mahomet said :

"God is right to allow nothing on earth to *always* surpass everything else."

While perhaps a little too sensual, Mahomet was neither vain, covetous nor corrupted by ambition and fanaticism. He was mostly gentle, sensitive, and humane, even irresolute at the moments when he felt himself uninspired ; he was affable with everyone and very simple in his habits. He used to sweep his bed-chamber, mend his clothes and his sandals, milk the ewes, lie on his back on the floor of the mosque,

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get up to let in a cat, look after a sick cockerel, wipe the sweat from his horse with his sleeve, give alms to the poor when he had anything to give, avoid as much as possible anything that gave him the air of being a king. He had neither court nor ministers, only advisers and several secretaries, and a seal on a silver ring bearing these words : " Mahomet, the Messenger of God ".

Now Mahomet began to devote the greater part of his time to expeditions. But at Medina he spent his days in prayer (the prescribed as well as spontaneous prayers), in sermons, in work, in the intimacy of his harem ; he was by no means opposed to recreation or amusements. Once he proposed to take 'Aïsha to see some negro performers who gave an exhibition of a combat with the lance and the shield. The young woman was delighted. She sat beside Mahomet, her cheek touching his and watched with pleasure the great slim bodies as they went through the movements of the combat. 'Omar wanted to expel these acrobats, but Mahomet said : " No, each people has its holiday. This is ours." And he himself gave the order for the start.

Another time, in spite of Abu Bakr, who thought these airs savoured of the devil, Mahomet allowed two Medina women to sing to 'Aïsha, in his presence, of the ancient civil wars of that town.

Loving children as he did, it must have been a cause of great regret that he had no son. He allowed his grandchildren to climb about his shoulders during prayers and to play about in the pulpit while he was being consulted by the faithful. One day a little girl, dressed in a yellow tunic which was so pretty that Mahomet congratulated her on it, began to play with

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the hairy growth on his back—the “Seal of Prophecy”. Her mother scolded her, but Mahomet said : “No, no, let her play.” And he encouraged the child.

Seeing a captive mother with her breasts filled with milk gather little children to her bosom, Mahomet pointed to her as an example, saying : “Assuredly, God is even more kind to his creatures than that mother to her child.”

Anas, his servant during ten years, praised his patience and said that he never spoke crossly. He was gentle with everyone, even in his rebukes ; he never used coarse language and while he was easy of access, he protected his solitude against intrusion. The Koran forbade people to enter the presence of the Prophet without being announced, to detain the Prophet unnecessarily, to call to him loudly when he was at home instead of waiting until he came forth from his house, or to raise their voices above that of the Prophet.

After the first enthusiasm of his arrival had died down, Mahomet encountered some difficulty at Medina. His arrival interfered with certain local interests and certain personal ambitions. ‘Abdallah ben Obayy, the Khazraj chief, had aspired to the supreme power of the city and he could never forgive the Prophet for having usurped it. The discontented ones grouped themselves about him. One day when Mahomet rode forth on his ass, accompanied by several of the disciples, he encountered a gathering of Jews and pagans, amongst whom was ‘Abdallah ben Obayy.

“Get off with you,” said he, as he draped himself in his cloak. “Your donkey stinks and you are covering us with dust.”

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“ The donkey of the Messenger of God smells better than you ! ” cried a Mussulman.

Words ! Blows ! Branches of the palm-tree, fists and feet were used. Mahomet dismounted and quelled the quarrel with difficulty. He tried to calm them by reciting from the Koran.

“ All that would be very pretty if it were true,” said ‘Abdallah. “ But you would do better to recite all that at home instead of bothering us with it.”

The Prophet remounted and continued on his way to the house of Sa‘d ben ‘Obâda.

“ Ibn Obayy is jealous of you,” said Sa‘d ben ‘Obâda. He had hoped to become king of our city. Forgive him.”

After the brilliant victory of Badr many idolaters of Medina were converted to Islam, more or less sincerely, and amongst them Ibn Obayy. But he was not sincere. He never ceased being the head of the opposition and secretly caused Mahomet many difficulties. While Mahomet managed the insincere converts with diplomacy, he likewise dubbed them the *munafiqûn*, the “ hypocrites ”.

In spite of his prestige, Mahomet often had difficulty in maintaining his authority over such a turbulent race. Undoubtedly few leaders have been obeyed with as much enthusiasm as was Mahomet. But the Arab is essentially anarchistic. He is not used to any sort of discipline. Mahomet performed a real miracle in eventually grouping them under the standard of Islam. Without speaking of the “ hypocrites ”, the Auxiliaries of Medina did not always get on with the Emigrants of Mecca and they felt themselves quite different from the Bedouins, the most difficult of all to handle—proud, impulsive

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and quick to take offence. The judgments rendered by Mahomet and the division of the spoils were the source of continual quarrels. Mahomet called upon the supernatural as much as upon his innate diplomacy to arrange matters. Was not his personal disinterestedness an example to follow?

One day he was quite overcome to see almost all his audience vanish before his very eyes. The drum announcing the arrival of a caravan had just been heard, and everyone hastened to the scene either for business, or out of curiosity.

Mahomet tried to win over the nomads. Everything was done to make those who came to Medina remain, and the complete oath of fidelity required that they stay in the city. To return to the desert was considered almost as an act of apostasy. Like Mahomet, the early caliphs fought against the call of a wandering life. (Once, on account of this nostalgia, a Bedouin committed suicide in Medina.) Mahomet feared for the future of the nation if the Arabs did not give up the nomadic life which Islam has sometimes been accused unjustly of encouraging. He praised the benefits of a sojourn in the holy city which was in reality so unhealthy that a short stay sufficed to make the belly swell, and the rest of the body grow lean, and where the Emigrants had suffered dreadfully from a pernicious fever. He put up with the improprieties of the Bedouins. Once when a Bedouin was making water in the very mosque, Mahomet protected him from the others who wanted to make him pay for this outrage. "Let him make a pail-full, if he likes," said he.

On another occasion a Bedouin pulled at Mahomet's cloak with such force that his skin was badly scratched. "O Mahomet, give me some of Allah's riches that

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you hold in your power," he cried. Mahomet turned to him laughingly and gave him a present.

But Mahomet could be very severe with those who lacked faith. The Koran condemns the lack of faith of the nomads and their frequent treacheries. He reproached their placing a halo of false glory about the heads of "bragging nomads who live in tents of camels' skins" and who bestow upon themselves imaginary ancestors. He had much difficulty in instilling in them an understanding of spirituality and concentration in God. If an Arab came to Medina and his wife bore him a son and his mare had young, the Arab would say : "This indeed is an excellent religion ;" but if his wife and his mare remained sterile, he would proclaim : "What a bad religion !"

The nomads are of a practical nature. They like most of all to pillage but not to kill and be killed. They like to be praised for their generosity and courage ; generally they are no more conscious of the "monotheistic" poetry of the desert than the average peasant is alive to the beauty of nature. The Prophet's teaching had a far better grip upon the dwellers of the cities who were less barbarous and who were prepared for the coming of Islam by their association with the Jewish cultivators and the Christian merchants.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE BATTLE OF BADR

*Thou shalt in no wise reckon those who have been slain . . . in the cause of God, dead ; nay, they are sustained alive with their Lord, rejoicing for what God in his favour hath granted them.*

Koran, iii, 163.

*Ye seek the accidental goods of this world, but God regardeth the life to come.*

Koran, viii, 68.

*A martyr is a man who gives his life for something other than wealth.*

Mahomet.

PARADISE lies in the shadow of the sword.

“Death is the last enemy to be vanquished,” said St. Paul. Joseph de Maistre heard the terrible cry of the earth for blood, the sobbing of a world athirst for salvation, “an immense altar upon which all that lives must be sacrificed without cease until the end of all things, until the death of Death.” Religions thrive on the blood of martyrs.

From the time of the second oath of ‘Aqaba, the theory of the holy war, the *jihâd*, developed in the mind of Mahomet and in the Koran. Mahomet was not a pacifist ; he believed that there were certain principles for which one should fight and, if necessary, die. There is no inconsistency between the turning

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of the other cheek for a personal injury and the rescue of a child that is being murdered.

During ten years the Mussulmans had suffered all manner of persecution without putting up any defence. During that period the Koran commanded them to endure with patience. Now they were exiled from their native land a price had been set upon their leader, a new state had been formed by them. Since the Hegira a virtual state of war existed between the town of the idolaters and the Prophet's city. It was now a question of life or death for Islam and war was the only way of settling it. Should the Qoraishites attack Medina and be victorious it would mean the end of Islam. It became necessary for the Mussulmans to "kill and be killed", to fight those who had unjustly chased them from their firesides simply for having said : "Allah is our God". Liberty of conscience could only be maintained by a war. To die in the "path of the Lord" was considered martyrdom. The Qoraishites, the tribes of Arabia and the Jews of Medina, were allied against Islam, whose chances of success were slight.

Now the Koran often becomes a war-song exhorting the faithful to courage, the reading of a general's orders to his army. It roused the lukewarm, shamed the hesitating, denounced the "hypocrite" defeatists and promised to the martyrs the cool shades of Eden. One night under arms was the equivalent of two months of fasting and praying.

*"Verily God hath purchased of the true believers their souls and their substance, promising them the enjoyment of paradise . . ."*

There even appeared an excellent example, for at that very moment the Greeks of Heraclius defeated the Persians, thus saving the churches of Syria

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and, in consequence, the Mussulmans of the Hijaz (xxii, 40, 41).

Often the attitude of the first Mussulmans is contrasted with that of the first Christians. Undoubtedly, the picture of the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen, praying for his executioners arouses more admiration than that of the first Moslem martyr, Khobaïb, cursing his enemies with : "O Lord, count them all and make them perish one by one ! " But they both died for their faith, equally convinced that they had earned the martyr's palm. The circumstances were different, but the principle the same. In an ultra-civilized country as well-policed as the Roman Empire was, where the early Christians were unarmed and to whom Jesus gave the injunction to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.. there was no alternative but to allow existing justice to take its course, as Socrates had done. In anarchistic Arabia where a state of perpetual warfare existed between clan and tribe, where no one ever went forth unless provided with sword or javelin, the Mussulmans were led to war by force of circumstance and war was considered a means of legitimate defence by them.<sup>1</sup>

"Before our days," said Mahomet to his flock, "there were men over whose heads a saw was placed and this saw descended cutting them in two. Combs of iron were thrust into them until all the flesh had been torn from the bones. But these men did

<sup>1</sup> In his *Primaute du Spirituel* p. 300, M. J. Maritain says : The early Christians did not seek to overthrow the existing empire which persecuted them because they were altogether powerless to establish a Christian state. Hence they were practically forced to turn their attention to things spiritual. . . . Likewise their revolt . . . would have imperilled the existence of the city. There remained for them martyrdom, which was not the worst of solutions.

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not deny their faith. In the name of God, Islam must rise to such a point that a horseman can go from San'a to Hadramawt without any fear in him, except that of God for himself and the wolf for his herd. You must hasten to accomplish this."

The theory of the holy war was not to convert people with the menace of the sword. "*No force in religion. The true road is sufficiently different from the false,*" the Koran says explicitly. The Koran lays down the rule of attacking last and always being moderate. The successive revelations, fragmentary and disordered, relate to contemporary events, to the line of conduct to be pursued by Mahomet and his disciples, as the situations present themselves. It would be improper to draw general conclusions from these injunctions, which were a mixture. Besides, material purposes perverted sometimes the religious ones. The *jihad*, from having been a means, became an end, and the spiritual was sacrificed to the temporal often in scandalous fashion.

From the days of the Prophet some Mussulmans saw in the holy war only the possibilities of fruitful *razzias*. When they encountered people in the course of an expedition, they often killed them outright without asking who they were and then claimed that they were infidels in order to exonerate themselves. The Koran vigorously condemns such practices. Although Mahomet gave blow for blow and treachery for treachery, and in the heat of battle fell into an excess of ardour, he was rarely cruel in cold blood and more often showed proof of a remarkable moderation. His generosity in the days of his final triumph exhibited a greatness of soul rare indeed in the pages of history. He commanded his soldiers to spare the feeble, the old, women and children ; he forbade their destroying

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houses, making off with harvests or cutting down fruit trees . . . He prescribed the use of the sword only in cases of necessity. We see him publicly condemning some of his captains and giving recompense for the damage done by them. "The gaining of a single soul," he declared, "is worth more than the richest conquest."

The seizing of booty was the natural outcome of all combats and, with commerce and herding, formed, we might well say, the national industry of the Arabs. Mahomet tolerated it in his people "because of their weakness"; but the dividing of the spoils was strictly regulated; the greater part went to charity and the upkeep of the army. He forbade the separating of captive children from their mothers. He could not radically change the character of his people, but he did modify it in many points. He himself was only an illiterate man, almost without culture, altogether typical of his race and his epoch, but he knew that "God's mercy was beyond measure". It would seem from all accounts that he had to battle mightily with himself to overcome a natural tendency towards vindictiveness. "He who learns to forgive," said he, "comes very near to being a prophet." Perhaps he suffered when he realized that he himself did not always attain to a state of perfection.

Following the great Mussulman conquests, many of his people became enormously wealthy. The disciples amassed considerable fortunes by pillaging the treasures of Chosroes and the churches of Egypt. Humble Bedouins decked their arms with jewels that had belonged to the Sassanide emperors. Ez Zubair amassed a fortune equal to fifty million French francs. "What I fear most for you, my friend," Mahomet said one day, thinking of the

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time to come, " is the abundance of your possessions in this world."

Even when Mus'ab ben 'Omaïr was killed at Ohod he did not own even a piece of stuff large enough to be used as a shroud. It only covered the upper part of his body and they put grass over his feet. One day 'Abderrahman ben 'Awf, when thinking of this martyr who had given his all for the cause of God, leaving his possessions behind in Mecca, said : " He was more worthy than we. The good things of this world have come to us in great quantities. Are we perhaps receiving our rewards in this world ? " And the old warrior began to weep . . .

In the course of ten years Mahomet sent forth forty expeditions. This man who, when he is not represented as an adroit impostor, is often described as an epileptic visionary, personally took part in thirty campaigns and directed ten battles, not to mention the difficult negotiations he had to undertake. We know what qualities are required to support an expedition in Arabia—the physical endurance, the perseverance, the untiring diplomacy that must form part of the nature of every Arabian chief, whose power is always unstable, depends upon his ability to dominate personally. In this difficult and exhausting art Mahomet excelled.

From the moment of his arrival in Medina, Mahomet began to prepare for war. Circumstances soon placed an army at his command. At the instigation of Abu Sofyan the goods and the houses of the Emigrants were confiscated in Mecca and they naturally cried aloud for revenge. The *Ansar* of Medina had sworn to follow the Prophet in all combats. The city could scarcely feed the new arrivals. A few months after his coming Mahomet sent out several

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expeditions. He sent his uncle, Hamza, with a company of thirty Emigrants in the direction of the sea, and 'Obaïda ben El Harith, with a company of sixty, in another direction, to spy out the caravans of Mecca. Hamza met a party of Qoraishite horsemen, greater in number than his own followers; but he prepared to charge on them, when the sheikh of the district intervened forbidding them to come to blows. 'Obaïda likewise encountered a superior force whom he attacked with such energy that they believed him supported by another body of men and, fearing a trap, took to flight. There was no battle. Only one arrow was drawn—the first of the holy war—by Sa'd ben Abi Waqqas, and it struck an idolater.

Two men of the Qorashites, who had secretly been converted to Islam, took advantage of the situation to desert to 'Obaïda's party.

Shortly afterwards Mahomet himself set forth with two hundred men, whom he posted at Bowat; here they lay in wait an entire month for a caravan that escaped them. He went forth again in September to Oshaira. The great winter caravan between Mecca and Syria was to cross here. The stakes were considerable, this caravan being one of the most valuable that had been sent out for a long time, although it only comprised a thousand camels and an escort of fifty men. The amount involved was fifty thousand gold dinars, or a million French francs. Every one in the city, from the rich bankers to the most humble of the Meccans, had subscribed to this enterprise. The clan of the Ommayads had forty thousand dinars tied up in this venture, thirty thousand of which were for the firm of Abu Ohaïha alone. This firm pledged its credit and joined its reserve funds to that of its clients, to whom it promised a profit of

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fifty per cent, in recognition of which the Ommayad Abu Sofyan received charge of the economic arrangements of the expedition, as well as the supreme command, above that of the technical guide (*dale*) who selected the trail and arranged the halts and that of the *khafir* who looked after the safety of the caravan by buying the protection of the tribes through whose territory they had to pass, as well as the right to pasture beasts and to draw water from the wells.

But the Prophet had no better luck than before. His prey once more escaped, and he left at the end of the march having accomplished nothing better than an alliance with the tribe that inhabited the region.

But the Qoraishites did not remain idle. A small group of bold horsemen came to the very gates of Medina where they did some slight damage. Mahomet hastily sallied forth from the city and pursued them in vain as far as the territory of Badr.

In autumn Mahomet sent 'Abdallah ben Jahsh at the head of eight *Mohajirūn* to reconnoitre in the region beyond Mecca in the direction of Taif. This was a dangerous mission. Instructions were enclosed in a sealed packet which the chief was only to read *en route*. When he had done so he gathered his men together and acquainted them with the nature of his mission giving them the choice of following him or of returning. They elected to remain with him. They then went to Nakhla, between Mecca and Taif, after having carefully inspected the outskirts of the enemy's city. They placed themselves in an ambush in a wood above the valley through which the trail passed.

It was then the beginning of the month of Rajab, one of the holy months during which all hostilities must cease. The people of Taif had just harvested

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their fruit and were drying the grapes exported from their fertile mountain sides. The nine Mussulmans watched the road, uncertain what course to follow. Then one day a small caravan of Qoraishites, headed by Ibn el Hadrami, came by. It was loaded with Taïf raisins which they were taking to Mecca.

The idolators ! . . . What ought they to do ? The ancestral instinct for the raid (*razzia*) blazed forth. Hatred for these infidels who had chased them, the true believers, from their homes, surged up.

‘Abdallah and his men could not resist temptation. They rushed down the sides of the hill, jumping from rock to rock ; they threw themselves upon the merchants, killing one and making prisoners of two others. The others fled, leaving their beasts and their goods to the Mussulmans, who divided the spoils amongst them, reserving a fifth part for the Prophet. Then they took the road to Medina, where they arrived without further incident.

A huge public scandal followed. The holy truce had been violated ! The whole of Tihama was indignant. Even in Medina the sacrilege was condemned. Mahomet reprimanded them and declined to accept his share of the booty. ‘Abdallah and his men were so distressed and humiliated that they felt ill. Then the Prophet had a revelation :

*“It is true that to make war during the months of truce is a crime. But to disown God, to worship idols, to forbid the servant of God to enter into the House of Prayer (the Ka‘ba), to drive him from his native land—him and his family—is an even greater crime.”*

In the month of December, they heard that the famous caravan of Abu Sofyan was returning from Syria laden with precious merchandise. It was the same caravan that they had lain in wait for at Oshaïra

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in the month of September. Mahomet hastily collected all his forces : seventy *Mohajirūn* and two hundred and forty *Ansar*. They went in the direction of Badr, a valley where the road to Medina joined that of the caravan trail from Mecca to Syria. To the north and east were steep mountains, to the south were stony hills, and to the west dunes of shifting sand. There were deep wells ; a stream flowing through the valley watered some cultivated land and a grove of date trees. There was an annual market at Badr when the tribes of the Hijaz gathered together to exchange merchandise.

The Mussulmans had only seventy camels and two horses. The horses were led on tethers and had riders only at the instant of charging the enemy. The men took turns on the camels carrying the coats of mail worn only in actual combat. 'Ali carried the black flag of the *Mohajirūn*, called "the Eagle". The *Ansar* also carried their banner, likewise black. On the road they met a Bedouin of whom they asked whether he had seen the Qoraishites.

"No," he answered.

"Pay your respects to the Prophet," ordered one of the Mussulmen.

"What ! Have you a Prophet with you ? "

"Yes."

"Well, I would like to ask him what is within my camel's belly."

Mahomet did not answer. But Selma ben Maslāma, who more than liked a joke, replied :

"Do not ask the Prophet that. I can tell you. You jumped upon your camel and now she is pregnant by you ! "

But Mahomet reproved him, saying, "Do not utter coarse words."

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Half-way to Badr, the Mussulmans heard that the Qoraishites had learned of their danger and were sending a large army for the protection of the returning caravan. The Prophet held a council. Some wanted to march against the Qoraishites and others against the caravan. Mahomet thought better of the first idea and, accordingly, they continued to Badr and, since they arrived before the enemy, were able to select an advantageous position and rest before the battle.

The Qoraishites had indeed been informed of their danger. Abu Sofyan sent a messenger to Mecca, which cost him twenty dinars. It is said that three days before the arrival of the messenger, one of Mahomet's aunts, 'Atika bint 'Abdelmottalib, married in Mecca, saw in a dream this bearer of evil tidings, this *nadhir*, first hurrying on his camel, then mounting the roof of the Ka'ba and summoning the men to arms. The story of this dream spread quickly.

Abu Jahl said to 'Abbas, 'Atika's brother : " Is it not enough that your family has produced a Prophet ? Now you have got a Prophetess too ! If nothing happens within three days we shall all be obliged to believe that you, the Banu Hashim, are the greatest liars amongst all the Arabs ! "

But at that very moment a rider covered with dust stopped in the public square and, according to the Arab custom, tore his tunic in the front and in the back, slit his camel's ears, upset his saddle and began howling like a demon. When an excited crowd had gathered round him, the man, half naked and covered with sand and blood, wailed aloud : " O Qoraishites ! O shame ! Help ! Help ! " continuing to howl. At last he told them that Abu Sofyan's caravan was menaced by Mahomet's army and it would be difficult indeed to save its riches.

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“ You shall see ! ” exclaimed the Qoraishites. “ This shall not be a repetition of Nakhla ! ” Some wanted to call in the aid of the neighbouring tribes, to arm the slaves, to mobilize the Ahabish. Others said : “ We have not time for that. What is to be done must be done with speed.” The Qoraishites armed themselves in haste, some leaving the counter and shop for the saddle, and others the pen and the ledger for the lance and the sabre without having recourse to the aid of the Ahabish, their mercenaries, mere black slaves inhabiting the suburbs. Those of the Qoraishites who could not go sent a substitute. El ‘Asi ben Hisham went as a substitute for Abu Lahab, who paid him forty thousand dirhems. There was also a small number of black slaves, hastily armed with short javelins which they handled very skilfully.

The army of Mecca, one thousand strong, having seven hundred camels and two hundred horses, confident because of its superior numbers and the advantage of a force of cavalry, took the road to Badr.

The Mussulman army was entrenched in the Badr valley in a favourable position on the north and east side facing the road to Mecca. Those who were mounted were armed with lances and sabres ; those on foot with bows and arrows. Then they dug a ditch causing all the streams of the valley to flow in front of their stronghold. And Sa‘d ben Mo‘adh, full of zeal for the safety of the Prophet, had a small hut of branches constructed on a hillock behind the battlefield.

The Mussulman army had rested, was in excellent form and in position when, at dawn, coming from behind the sandy hill of Aqanqal, they espied the advancing Qoraishite army. A fortunate downpour of rain had filled the wells and settled the sand.

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The Mussulmans had sent spies to the well of the market-place at Badr where the Arabs of the neighbourhood and the passing caravans brought their beasts to drink. They seized two men who, after being beaten, told them that the Meccans were entrenched behind the sandyhill and that each day they slaughtered ten camels with which to feed themselves. "There are, therefore, a thousand of them," concluded Mahomet. "And which of the important men are amongst them?"

"Otba ben Rabi'a, Shaiba ben Rabi'a, Abu Jahl, Omayya ben Khalaf, Ibn Hisham, 'Abbas, Abu'l Bakhturi and others are amongst them," was the answer.

"Mecca is offering us her liver (the best of her sons)."

Two young Bedouin women were drawing water from the well in the market-place. "To-morrow," they said, "the Qoraishite caravan will pass here. We shall earn some money by being of use to them."

Two Mussulman spies who had come to water their beasts overheard this conversation and reported it to Mahomet. But Abu Sofyan had also sent out scouts who noticed in the dung of these strangers' camels the presence of tiny date stones such as could only have come from Medina. They came to their own conclusions which they reported to their chief, who changed the route of the caravan, going more to the west, passing by the sand dunes near the sea.

When the caravan of precious merchandise had thus escaped the Mussulmans, Abu Sofyan sent word to the Qoraishite army : "Our goods have been saved. You may go home." But Abu Jahl wanted to fight.

"We did not come here for nothing at all," he

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declared, " and we shall not leave without celebrating the victory at the fair of Badr. We shall stay here for three days and eat camels' flesh and drink wine. The singers will sing of our prowess and the other Arabs will hear us," and the little red-haired man brandished his sword about wildly, shouting in verse that his seventy years would not keep him from fighting, that it was for the making of war that his mother had brought him into the world. . . .

Several Qoraishite scouts approached the ditch of water dug by the Mussulmans and tried to drink it. The Prophet ordered his men to fall upon them. Only one escaped. 'Omaïr ben Wahab, gone in search of them, reported that the enemy was well posted and in a warlike mood. Neither he nor the man who had escaped were optimistic about the situation. 'Otba ben Rabi'a said :

" If we fight we shall kill our brothers, our uncles, our cousins. We would do better to return home and let Mahomet face the other Arabs . . . If they give him battle so much the better. At least we will have nothing to fear from reprisals."

This wise counsel enraged Abu Jahl, who had already taken his shining armour out of its casing. " We shall not listen to 'Otba," he cried. " He speaks thus because he has a son in Mahomet's camp and because he is afraid of these eaters of camels' flesh. We shall not leave here until God has chosen between them and us."

He called to 'Amir ben el Hadrami, the brother of the man who had been killed at Nakhla. 'Amir tore his garments and, naked, brandishing his lance, he called loudly and pathetically for vengeance. After this scene no one would listen to 'Otba, and the imposing army set out. After having passed around

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Aqanqal Hill, the army was spied by the Mussulmans, who sallied forth, expecting that a rich caravan, so feebly protected, would fall into their hands almost without a struggle ; but when they found themselves actually face to face with an enemy far greater than them in numbers they lost heart. But the enthusiasm of the Prophet revived their courage ; for he promised them victory in the name of God. Besides, it was too late to turn back.

Battles in Arabia are not generally very bloody. They consist, usually, in a series of single combats, of noisy charges, of flights either real or feigned, all of which results in a mighty tumult but not many victims. The Arabian warrior is a mixture of bravado and extreme caution, although having much real courage. He is careful not to expose himself unnecessarily ; he seeks the maximum of advantage with the minimum of trouble. "War is a ruse." He prefers the *razzia* to an open fight. The Arab, even the Arab of to-day, is no more able to accept the methods of modern warfare than could have the cavaliers of Crecy. But up to a certain point Mahomet invented a new sort of strategy which by no means was the least of his works.

The battle of Badr began by single combats and a great exchange of words ; 'Otba ben Rabi'a, Abu Sofyan's father-in-law, his brother Shaiba and his son, El Walid, all clad in armour, came forth and challenged the bravest of the enemy. Three young *Ansar* came forward. But the three Omméiades refused to fight with them saying :

"No, no, our challenge is meant for the renegades of our city."

Then Hamza, with an ostrich plume on his breast, 'Ali wearing a cuirass protecting both front and back (a rather rare thing) and 'Obaïda presented themselves

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and called out their names loudly. Then the six charged furiously, Hamza and 'Ali killed Shaïba and El Walid and then came to the aid of 'Obaïda, dangerously wounded. They killed 'Otba and carried off 'Obaïda, who was mortally wounded, having one foot cut off. He died soon after. Mecca had lost her three greatest champions.

But others came forward. Once more the Qoraishites were beaten. Then Mahomet gave the orders and the confusion became general. When those dying of thirst dragged themselves to the ditch to drink, the Mußulmen archers shot them full of arrows and the noonday sun cast millions of burning darts upon the scene of slaughter. The Prophet, accompanied by Abu Bakr, entered his hut, before which stood Sa'd ben Mo'adh, with sword in hand, and several *Ansar*. In the valley the battle raged. Cries mounted in clouds of dust and there was an acrid smell of blood in the air. Mahomet, in an excess of ecstasy and nervousness, fainted. Abu Bakr looked at him, stretched out on the ground and stiff as a cataleptic, his face bathed in sweat. Finally the Prophet came to himself.

"Let us rejoice," said he, "for God's help is at hand," and he ordered that they bring him his horse.

"You are in the shade while your companions fight under the sun," the Angel Gabriel had said to him, so, in spite of the protestations of Abu Bakr and Sa'd, he mounted his horse and joined in the conflict. He called upon his men to battle valiantly and promised them paradise as a reward.

"Is there nothing between me and paradise except death?" asked 'Omaïr ben el Hamam, who had been eating dates the while.

"No, nothing," replied the Prophet.

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‘Omaïr threw away the dates and rushed to be killed.

“ What would please God greatly ? ” asked young Awf ben el Harith, one of the three *Ansar* who had first stepped forth in answer to the challenge of the sons of Rabi‘a.

“ To fight the enemy without a coat of mail,” was the answer.

The young man at once threw off his cuirass and jumped into the fray where he soon fell under a shower of blows.

Evening was coming on. The battle had become a hand to hand fight. Above its din, the noise of the lances as they struck against the shields and the yelling of the warriors, could be heard the thin voice of Abu Jahl shouting :

“ All ties between you and us are cut for ever ! ”

Mahomet arrived. His horse’s hoofs sunk into the sand. The Prophet dismounted, took a handful of fine sand and threw it in the direction of the enemy with a magnificent gesture, almost ritual in character, as he said :

“ May confusion enter their ranks ! ” And he cried to his own men : “ Fight without fear, for paradise lies in the shadow of the sword.”

He then entered his hut as the Mussulmans gave their war-cry : “ Ahad ! Ahad ! One God ! One God ! ”

At this point the outcome of the battle was decided as well as the destiny of Islam. The balance began to turn in favour of the Mussulmans. Unknown forces from nowhere intervened—those forces to which the soul of man is linked by invisible jewelled chains. The Qoraishites had lost many of their best swordsmen; they held a less favourable position, but worse, they

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were dying of thirst. They had the advantage, however, of superior numbers. But those incalculable elements, those forces which so often unexpectedly determine the fate of man, intervened. The heavens themselves became a battle-ground. Those flashes of lightning were the cuirasses of the celestial warriors as they darted about in the angry heavens ; those peals of thunder were the blasts of their trumpets and that low, distant rumbling was the sound of the wings of the celestial horses. Those strange lights falling on the eyes of the dying below were the reflection of their yellow turbans and of their long, white robes which fluttered like banners in the wind.

‘Ali killed seven idolaters one after the other. Ez Zubair, challenged by ‘Obaïda, whose whole body was encased in a thick suit of mail so that only his eyes were visible, struck him in the eye with such force that the end of his lance was bent.

Abu Jahl continued to fight. Two young *Ansar* had sworn to kill this insulter of the Prophet or to die in the attempt. ‘Abderrahman ben ‘Awf recognized him as he struck in all directions in the thickest of the fight, and called to the two young *Ansar*. They leapt upon him and one of them, Mo‘adz, succeeded in throwing him down. But the old man’s son, ‘Ikrima, struck the arm of his father’s aggressor so savagely that the left arm was torn from the socket, and hung down from the shoulder by a shred of flesh. The young man was so drunk with the heat of battle that he did not at first notice his ghastly wound. Then realizing his condition, he bent over so that his arm lay on the ground and placing his foot upon it, tore it from the shoulder with one wrench.

The Qoraishites began to feel themselves beaten and took to flight. They dropped their shields, their

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cuirasses and their arms, the better to run and retard pursuit also, for arms and cuirasses were objects of great value in Arabia and the conquerors were certain to stop to gather them up.

'Abdallah ben Mas'ud found Abu Jahl in a dying state. He put his foot on his chest ready to deal him the death-blow, but the old man asked : "To whom is the victory ? "

"To God and his Prophet."

The dying man lifted himself up painfully and with a terrible look, a mingling of sadness, rage and pride; he grasped 'Abdallah's beard and said :

"Little herdsman that you are ! You are about to kill me. But you aspire a trifle too high. I am the noblest man that it shall be given you to put to death. And I have already been vanquished by a mere peasant . . . "

'Abdallah cut off his head and brought it to the Prophet.

"There is no God but Allah !" said he, prostrating himself. "This man was the Pharaoh of our nation, and he has been punished as shall be punished all the enemies of Allah ! "

El 'Abbas, Mahomet's uncle, who had fought in the Qoraishite army, had been made prisoner by an *Ansari*. Mahomet had commanded that those of his family, those of the Hashimites who had remained at Mecca, and Abu'l Bakhturi, to whom he was under obligation for being instrumental in having the excommunication against himself and his family annulled, were to be spared. This order, however, was not accepted without remonstrances.

'Abbas was saved but Abu'l Bakhturi was less fortunate. Some *Ansar* found him beside one of his friends.

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“ The Messenger of God has forbidden us to kill you. Surrender.”

“ And my friend ? ” he inquired.

“ It is only you we are to spare. As for him, we shall kill him.”

“ Then we shall die together. By Almighty God ! the women of Mecca shall not say that I abandoned my friend because I did not know how to be generous with my life.” And as he died beside his friend, Abu'l Bakhturi improvised a poem on this theme. The murderer, improvizing in his turn, replied :

“ I strike with my lance until it curves like a bow. As a mother-camel suckling her young, so my sword gives to Death streams of blood with which to quench her thirst.”

The pursuit continued, as well as the search for booty. ‘Abderraham ben ‘Awf had gathered several valuable cuirasses, and was returning to camp bent under their weight when he met, seated sadly on a stone, with his son beside him, Omayya ben Khalaf, a friend of his in Mecca, who called to him : “ Do you want to take me as prisoner ? I am worth more than those cuirasses.”

Recognizing his friend, ‘Abderrahman threw aside the armour and conducted Omayya and his son to the Mussulman camp by the hand.

Then Bilal, a former negro slave of Omayya’s, whom he had badly maltreated in the past, went by, and recognizing his former master, turned as pale as his black skin would allow. “ The chief of the infidels ! (*ra’s el kufr*), ” he cried, rolling his eyes about wildly. “ He must be killed ! I shall never be safe if he is allowed to go free.”

“ O Bilal ! ” said ‘Abderrahman, “ he is my prisoner.”

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“No, I am not safe as long as he is safe. The chief of the infidels is Omayya ben Khalaf !”

“Do you hear, O negro, I tell you that he is my prisoner who belongs only to me,” said ‘Abderrahman impatiently.

“I am lost if he is spared,” repeated the black, not wishing to give up. “The chief of the infidels is Omayya ben Khalaf.”

And full of rancour he began to call in a loud voice : “O *Ansar*, O aids of Allah and of the Prophet ! The chief of the infidels is Omayya ben Khalaf and I am not safe if he is safe !”

Thus he incited a certain number of Mussulmans who soon began to echo his cries of death. Suddenly a man drew his sword and smote the son of Omayya who let out such a piercing shriek that ‘Abderrahman declared he had never heard anything like it.

“Save yourself !” called ‘Abderrahman to the unfortunate father. “Save yourself, by Allah ! I did not do you a good turn in taking you prisoner.”

Omayya tried to escape, but being stout, he was readily caught and put to death, although his friend tried to shield him with his own body.

“May God be merciful to this Bilal,” groaned ‘Abderrahman. “I have lost my cuirasses and he has made me lose my prisoner as well.”

The son of Abu Bakr, ‘Abderrahman, had remained pagan and when his father saw him and asked what had become of his possessions in Mecca he fled as he called back insolently in verse :—

“There remain only some bows and arrows and a sword to cut off the shame of old age.”

The memorable day of Badr, when the Mussulmans had started out with the idea of easy pillage and had raised themselves at moments almost to the sublime

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unfortunately was blemished at the end by the avariciousness of the conquerors and by a dawning fanaticism. On the battlefield lay fourteen slain Mussulmans and seventy Qoraishites. The victors had taken seventy-four prisoners. They began to bury the dead. The Mussulmans were piously laid to rest while the bodies of the enemy dead were thrown pell-mell into an old well and then grossly insulted. The corpses had already begun to rot but the victors could not make up theirs minds to cover them with earth, preferring to insult them longer. 'Omar asked the Prophet to call away his men but the Prophet replied : "In the excess of their joy, they will remain deaf to my orders."

Some of the Mussulmans' own fathers were amongst the enemy dead.

On the third day Mahomet approached the horrible pit and began a dramatic speech which, he said, could be heard by the dead as well as by the living. "Now they know that what I said was the truth," said he, continuing in antithetic verse :—

"Have you found what your idols promised you ? As for us, we have found what our Lord promised us. What bad countrymen you have been to your Prophet ! You treated me as a liar but others believed in me. You drove me from your midst but others welcomed me. You fought me but others helped me."

The Mussulman army spent three days deciding the fate of the prisoners and the distribution of the booty. 'Omar wanted all the captives to be killed ; Abu Bakr wanted them to be held for ransom. The latter counsel prevailed. El 'Abbas, Mahomet's uncle, 'Aqil, his cousin and 'Ali's brother, had to pay a large sums for their release. 'Abbas was stripped naked by those who coveted his splendid raiment;

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Mahomet asked them to find a tunic with which to cover him, but only 'Abdallah ben Obayy had one large enough for 'Abbas. Some of the prisoners who had neither family nor riches were released against a promise never again to bear arms against Islam. The others were to await the arrival of their ransom at Medina; some of them paid off by teaching the people of Medina how to read and write, an accomplishment of almost every Qoraishite but very rare in Medina.

On the heels of the religious enthusiasm came disputes about the sharing of the booty. They almost came to blows. Abu Sofyan's rich caravan had escaped but they had acquired, nevertheless, a great quantity of arms and many camels, to say nothing of the money that was due for the captives' release. But how distribute this amongst the warriors, those who had brought in the booty and those who had maintained the guard around the Prophet? The dispute was bitter amongst the three parties. Mahomet finally decided that, since all belonged to God, his Prophet would distribute the spoils as he saw fit. He ordered that everything be taken away in mass and that camp be broken up. The next day the distribution (equal shares to all of them, which caused much dissension) took place on a hill between El Madhiq and En Nazia.

The division of the spoils was an important question that arose frequently. It was necessary to establish a precedent. Very opportunely Mahomet had a revelation. God ordered him to keep a fifth (the Arabian chiefs took a quarter of the whole), which he used according to his needs, those of his family, the poor, the orphans, the travellers, and the holy war.

At Es Safra, Mahomet bade 'Ali cut off the head of

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one of the prisoners, Nadhr ben el Harith, who had been one of the foremost amongst the persecutors of the Mussulmans at Mecca. It was he who had ridiculed the Koran and had recited Persian legends which he declared to be more beautiful than "the tales of the ancients" told by the Prophet. A little farther along the road 'Oqba met with the same fate for almost having strangled Mahomet one day in the Ka'ba.

"O Mahomet," he pleaded, "what will become of my children?"

"They will go to hell—even as you!" replied the Prophet.

A few weeks later someone recited to Mahomet an elegy on the death of the unfortunate Nadhr, composed by his sister, Qatila :—

"O Mahomet, son of a noble mother and a generous father, what harm would have befallen you had you been magnanimous? . . . The swords of his brothers cut into him; they dragged him to death, patient, exhausted, and chained like a slave."

Then Mahomet regretted his deed and said: "Could I but have heard these beautiful verses before, Nadhr would be living still."

Zaid carried the tidings of the victory to Medina. He arrived as they were burying Roqaia, Mahomet's daughter and 'Othman's wife, deceased after a very short illness.

Then they went before the victors, the young women playing their native timbrels (*def*) and singing.

Badr was the first of a series of victories which were to change the aspect of the world. That same year occurred the victory of the Christian Greeks over the Persian idolaters, as foretold in the Koran.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MECCA PREPARES HER REVENGE

#### 'ALI MARRIES FÂTIMA

*My tears have flowed like the pearls of a necklace whose string is broken.*

THE square in front of the Ka'ba was usually animated at this hour, but to-day it was almost deserted because all the great Qoraishites had gone to war. Safwan ben Omayya was playing darts with several old men, a gambling game forbidden by the Koran. They were each wearing two tunics, for the winter evenings were cool, and they were seated with their hairy legs folded under them. Several pious persons came to do the *tawâf* (the seven processional rounds of the Ka'ba) and to implore the help of Hobal, El Lât and El 'Ozza for the safety of the city. They were anxious because they had had no news of the army.

A man arrived in haste. Safwan stopped the game, "The caravan is saved!" cried the man. "Abu Sofyan is coming and all is well. No one has been killed and no camels lost. Our wealth has been doubled and tripled on the road of the land of Rum."

"Praised be God," cried Safwan. "And the army?"

"I do not know. The caravan escaped the renegades of our city, the companions of Mahomet (may God disperse them!) by taking to the trail

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along the sea. No doubt the army remained to further protect their route or perhaps they have gone forth to give the traitors of Yathrib a lesson they will remember, that is, if there remain any of them to remember."

The old Ommayad continued his game, reassured. But a warrior presently arrived with his sabre still hanging at his side although his shield was gone. His legs were covered with dust, his garment torn. As he ran, he let out sinister cries. The women and the children followed in his wake, the women moaning and going through the gesture of tearing out their hair and scratching their cheeks.

"What is it? Who are you?" asked one of the players.

"I am one of the Banu Khoza'a. I took part in the battle with your men. We have been shamefully beaten."

"What are you saying?"

"Otba ben Rabi'a is dead; Shaiba ben Rabi'a is dead; Abu'l Hakam (Abu Jahl) is dead; El Walid is dead; the two sons of El Hajjaj have been killed. Abu'l Bakhturi is dead . . . all the Qoraishite nobles are dead!"

They looked at each other torn between stupor and consternation.

"This man is mad," said Safwan ben Omayya in a whisper. "Ask him about me. He will tell you that I am dead, too!"

"And Safwan ben Omayya?" they asked the Khoza'ite.

"Ibn Omayya? He was not at the battle, but his father and his brother were killed under my very eyes. . . ."

The news of the defeat spread quickly. Abu

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Lahab was at home. A slave hurried to bring him the news but was punished for his pains. Then the stout, choleric, old man, leaning on his stick, went out into the town to the Zemzem wells where Abu Rafi', El Abbas's slave, was modelling some pottery which he did in the service of his master. He was a timid, frail, little man and a Christian, so, with a woman who shared his sentiments, he rejoiced at the defeat of the polytheists. The stout Abu Lahab stamped with rage and, leaning against the edge of the sacred wall, turned his back upon the slave. Abu Sofyan and Moghîra likewise stopped at the well.

“Tell me the real news,” said Abu Lahab to the caravan-leader, “You ought to know. I cannot believe what I have heard.”

Abu Sofyan sat down ; the people stood about him, hurling questions at this wisest of the Qoraishites. “What happened at Badr ?”

“Our men encountered the others near the wells of Badr and then fled. Mahomet's followers killed as many as they wanted to kill and made prisoners of others. What could have given them this power ? . . . Ah, why did they not follow my advice and return, since the caravan was saved ?”

“The angels helped them.” These words escaped the lips of the little potter, Abu Rafi'. Suddenly Abu Lahab turned round and slapped the slave who became very pale but straightened up as if to reply. But the angry old man whose arms had retained some of the strength of their youth, picked him up as if he were a feather and sent him rolling on the ground. The old man would have beaten him further but the woman who was present gave him aid. Hitting Abu Lahab with a stick on the head fiercely, she cried :

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"Aren't you ashamed to beat this poor, little man ! You dare to do it because his master is not here to defend him."

Made ridiculous by having been beaten by a woman and furious over the disaster of Badr, Abu Lahab died seven days later, less of an abcess which had developed (or was it smallpox ?) than from rage.

Thenceforth Mecca could think of nothing but revenge. The rich, animated by true civic patriotism, gave their part of the profits of the caravan (half a million) towards this end, being accustomed as financiers to huge losses in big speculations. The ransom of their prisoners amounted to two hundred thousand dirhems and, in addition, arms were paid over to the Mussulmans. All internal disagreements were laid aside. The aristocracy of Mecca in this way gave a display of the famous *hilm*, that political wisdom, the exercise of which later put the early destiny of the Moslem empire into their hands, giving them a much wider field for the development of their powers.

Abu Sofyan, who was tacitly recognized as the leader of the movement, gave the full measure of his value. One of his sons had been killed and another taken prisoner. He did not hasten the release of his son not wishing to betray the anxiety and the critical situation of the city. His father-in-law, a Bedouin Dawsite, had been murdered by a Makzumite, but he forbade his clan to wreak vengeance so as to avoid internal discord. His son, Yezid, brandished his lance about and called for vengeance. His father tore the lance from his hand and very nearly broke it across his head, saying :

"What ! Are we to begin a civil war under these conditions for the sake of a Bedouin ? "

The Qoraishites wrapped themselves in a mantle

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of stoicism. Feast days were forbidden and the musicians had no employment. No longer did they sing publicly, as had been the custom, the glories of the warriors killed in battle. They were even forbidden to weep for them.

A blind old man who had lost his three sons at Badr restrained with much difficulty from giving vent to his grief. One night he heard moaning and sobbing in a neighbouring house.

“Go see what it is,” he said to his slave. “Perhaps it is now permitted to mourn the dead.”

But it was only a woman who had lost her camel and the old man once more had to resign himself to silent tears. He wrote some melancholy verses about it. But his poems were not the only ones, for the battle of the warriors was always followed by the battle of the poets.

Although he disliked the poets and was careful to avoid identifying himself with them and to distinguish between their regularly rhymed verse and the free verse of the Koran inspired by Allah and not by the jinns ; although he abominated the free morals, the licentiousness and scepticism so frequent amongst the bards of Arabia who composed ballads in honour of the ancient traditions of a past society both anarchical and pagan, Mahomet always had some poets amongst his immediate following (as did all the chiefs of tribes and the rich Qoraishite tradesmen), for he knew that satires could wound more dangerously than arrows. At that period, the poets were the news-carriers of the peninsula and all the powers had need of their help. They were, in a sense, soothsayers (*sha’ir*) to whom inspiration came while in a trance. They were odd people, anointing only one side of their heads, wearing only one shoe,

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letting their cloaks drag and proving their communication with the Invisible by falling into trances. Their satires had also the power of incantations, the word having an influence in itself—hence the fear they inspired and the reason for seeking their goodwill. They were the tribal arbiters ; questions of war were not decided without them.

In order to protect himself against the satires of the Qoraishite poets Mahomet took unto himself three poets of Medina : Hassân ben Thâbit, Ka'b ben Mâlik and 'Abdallah ben Rawâha. The two first-named did not hesitate to attack the honour of the Qoraishite families while the latter confined his attacks chiefly to their lack of faith and their deeds.

Omayya ben Abi's-Salt, the *hanif* or vague monotheist with leanings towards Christianity, who could never forgive Mahomet for becoming the Prophet, was likewise a poet. Certain poems, with their descriptions of heaven and hell very much like the Koran, are usually attributed to him. But now he wrote songs to the glory of those fallen at Badr, "the generous sons of Qoraish, the strong men, the magnificent horses, all turned to dust in an evening." Hind, the daughter of 'Otba and the wife of Abu Sofyan, celebrated in verse the death of her father, "the chief who would not retreat", whom the Mussulmans "had struck after he was down", whom they had dragged to the shameful pit "his face in the dust".

The Mussulman poets, on the other hand, sang of their victory. Mahomet himself upon the field of battle chanted a song of triumph, several disconnected fragments of which are to be found in the Koran. "The mourners of Qoraish," sang a Mussulman bard, "have rended their garments. Iblis (the devil)

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has fooled our enemies.” He admits that “ we wanted only their camels (Abu Sofyan’s caravan), we asked for nothing else.”

“ My tears have flowed like the pearls of a necklace whose string is broken,” Harith ben Hisham replied to this poem, and he appealed to the Qoraishites to revenge their heroes, to defend their territory and their gods.

Hassân ben Thâbit declared, pointing to his tongue :

“ There is no leather that I cannot pierce with this weapon. It is short but I would not trade it against a weapon as long as the distance between San'a and Bosra.”

This poet was an *Ansari*; he naturally glorified the exploits of his fellow-townsmen who had welcomed the Prophet so whole-heartedly and had shared so generously their possessions with the Emigrants, whose assistance had determined the victory of Badr. But his invectives against the Qoraishites finally annoyed the Emigrants, for after all the Qoraishites were their relatives. Mahomet had to defend the reputation of his fellow-countrymen, for he did not want to see their prestige die out.

The Jews, at first surprised to see the Qoraishites beaten by a handful of peasants from Medina (Ka'b ben el Ashraf composed a melancholy song about the ruin of these patricians, these “ kings of Arabia ”), then decided that they need not come to a hasty conclusion because of the easy defeat of a troop of bourgeois without military training. They became alarmed at Mahomet’s increasing authority ; his prestige was heightened by a victory in which the people saw the confirmation of his prophetic mission. The Jews began to show their hostility to Islam openly.

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Medina, however, was filled with joy. Prosperity came with the payment of the ransoms. Mahomet had ordered that the prisoners should be well treated. Some of them had brothers and cousins amongst the Mussulmans. One of them, Abu'l 'Asi ben Rabi'a, was Zainab's husband, hence the son-in-law of Mahomet. He was also a nephew of Khadija. Zainab had remained in Mecca. She sent as the ransom of her husband a valuable necklace which had been their wedding gift from Khadija. Upon seeing these jewels once belonging to his dead wife, Mahomet was overcome with emotion. He wept, softened, and asked the Mussulmans to consent to the liberation of his son-in-law without ransom. Abu'l 'Asi left Medina and took the precious necklace with him. Mahomet, however, refused to diminish the ransom of his uncle, 'Abbas, by so much as a penny and he would have none of the protestations of sympathy that the old miser professed for Islam.

The Prophet had still another daughter, Fâtimâ, who was twenty years of age and unmarried. Roqaïa had just died. Omm Kulthum was married to 'Othman. Fâtimâ was a tall, thin, anaemic girl (she died young as did all Mahomet's children) with by no means a sweet disposition. She was neither as pretty as Roqaïa had been nor as intelligent as Zainab. Although well past the age when girls may expect offers of marriage in Arabia, she was not at all flattered when one day her father's voice said to her across the doorway-hanging of her apartment :

“ ‘Ali ben Abi Tâlib, the son of your uncle, has pronounced your name.”

The custom demanded that the young woman remain silent if she accepted, but if she wished to

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refuse the offer she shook the hanging over the doorway in protest.

Fâtimâ remained silent, but this, no doubt, was due to modesty, timidity or perhaps mere stupor, for later she said to her father :

“ You have married me to a beggar.” Fâtimâ regarded him as a man both poor in earthly and spiritual blessings, ugly and, although courageous, a miserable sort of fiancé. ‘Ali, on the other hand, was not much more enthusiastic about Fâtimâ.

When we read the tales of the exploits of Sidna ‘Ali, his trials and tribulations and his tragic end (all the cause of his deification amongst the tribes of the Druse and the Nosairis), we would like to imagine a radiant, young hero, filled with grace and power, whose divine face “ had never been sullied by bowing before an idol ”. We must be content to imagine ‘Ali, however, as a little, dark man with thin arms, a big head, a pair of large, heavy eyes and a flat nose ; (the Hashimites usually had noses so long that they “ drank before the lips ”, it was said). He was bald-headed and had a large abdomen, even when still young. But the expression of his face inspired sympathy, and when he smiled he showed his teeth. He was brave, pious, faithful and honest beyond a doubt, but he was likewise indolent and his character lacked decision.

“ What a strange looking creature that is,” said a woman in passing. “ One might say that he is made of parts that do not match.”

The marriage was duly celebrated, although ‘Ali had to gather *idhkhîr* to sell to the Jewish gem-merchants in order to have money to pay for the marriage feast. He had to give a dowry of four hundred dirhems, two-thirds of which was in perfumes,

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A cuirass captured at the battle of Badr, constituted his wife's marriage-portion. The feast was joyous, the guests ate heartily, the young slaves beat on their tambourines and sang the praises of the heroes of Badr.

But the night and the days that followed were less joyful. They were so poor they had not even a bed. Misery and discord were many times guests at their fireside until the rich booties of the great Mussulman victories relieved them a little. The weeping Fâtimâ was often exhausted by housework. When she complained of her fatigue and her infirmities to her father, showing him her hands made callus from the grinding of the grain and the kneading of the flour, and asked for a slave to help her, he replied by telling her of a prayer that would prove very efficacious if recited just before going to bed. There was no lack of slaves at Medina after the year 3 of the Hegira. 'Aîsha had three, but Fâtimâ was obliged to wait until the taking of Mecca before she could have one servant.

'Ali would grumbly draw water in the palm-grove of a Jew in order to earn a handful of dates which he would give to his wife with a sour face saying :

"Here ! Here is food for you and the children." These children were Hasan and Hosain, who are the ancestors of all Mahomet's descendants. Instead of facing the situation bravely, 'Ali would sulk and then go to sleep in the mosque. His father-in-law would try to reason with him and would succeed in temporarily reconciling the couple. But one day his daughter came to him weeping bitterly. Her husband had beat her.

Although the Prophet would speak of 'Ali's prominence in the Mussulman movement due to his early adherence to the faith by way of consoling

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Fâtimâ, he really did not think much of his son-in-law. He felt that his Ommayad son-in-law, the distinguished ‘Othman, and the continually absent Abu'l 'Asi did him more credit. He considered ‘Ali as an incapable and was displeased that he did not make his wife happy. He ordered ‘Ali to chop off the heads of the condemned but never honoured him with a command. When ‘Ali began to speak of taking another wife “over” Fâtimâ, the Prophet grew angry and protested publicly from the pulpit. Besides, ‘Ali had shown a decided lack of diplomacy by having in mind the daughter of Abu Jahl himself. To house under the same roof the daughter of God's Messenger and of his most bitter enemy—this was indeed an unfortunate idea ! ‘Ali was displeased that the Prophet would not allow him to indulge in the polygamy accorded to his other sons-in-law. It was even worse when ‘Ali and Fâtimâ, united by common enemies, had to fight against the wives of the Prophet.

“ You do not take your daughter's part,” complained Fâtimâ.

‘Ali, who was as unfortunate in politics as he was in marriage, betrayed, abandoned and duped by time-servers of all sorts, descends to us, nevertheless, as a noble character. Even if the authenticity of all the verses and all the maxims attributed to him is doubtful, it is at least probable that life inspired him with a pessimistic stoicism ; he must have pronounced these sentences with some degree of elation of spirit : “ Despair puts the soul to rest....” “ If you can resist yourself, you will have peace . . .” “ Desire kills him who desires . . .” “ Men are as low as their desires . . .” “ The world is a carcase ; whosoever wishes a part of it should accustom himself to the society of dogs.”

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Fortunately, Hasan and Hosain were born during the early years of their marriage, and while their birth aggravated the anæmic condition of their mother they rejoiced the heart of their grandfather.

“Dear little ones,” said Mahomet. “It is because of you that man becomes cowardly. You are the perfume of Allah.”

From their very birth he pronounced incantations over them, mixed his saliva with theirs and said the *shahada* in their ears. Mahomet arrived too late after the birth of the second child to mingle his saliva with that of the child before its first feeding ; therefore Hosain was less intelligent than his older brother.

“It is he who resembles me the most,” said ‘Ali without irony.

“They resemble the Prophet more than you, ‘Ali,” sang Fatima as she rocked them in her arms. And ‘Ali laughed.

Mahomet loved to play with his grandchildren, to kiss them on the navel, to have them pass between his legs, to suck their tongues, to make them jump upon his knees. He allowed them to climb upon his back while he knelt in prayer, and he prolonged his prostration so as not to disturb their play. If they made water on his clothes, he would not allow them to be scolded, but would pour a few drops of clean water over his tunic. Should they arrive at the mosque dressed in pretty, red robes, Mahomet would interrupt his sermon, descend from the pulpit and take them by the hand, excusing himself by saying :

“Allah has indeed said, ‘Your children shall be a temptation unto you’.”

‘Ali, on the day of his wedding, had gone to gather *idhkhir* with some friends so as to earn a little money.

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Upon his return he made his camel kneel down before the house of an inhabitant of Medina. Now, in that house, Hamza, Mahomet’s uncle, was drinking with a woman-singer. The orgy had already lasted for some time and Hamza was very drunk.

“Hi ! Hamza,” cried the woman, “finish off the two old fat camels.”

Hamza rose and, like an automaton, seized his sabre and rushed at the camels. He cut off their humps, cut open their chests and tore the livers out from within them.

‘Ali returned just in time to witness this terrible spectacle and immediately complained to the Prophet. The Prophet, with ‘Ali and Zāid, ran to the scene, and at the sight, the Prophet went into a rage. But Hamza, covered with blood and hiccoughing, shouted :

“Who are you but the slaves of my ancestors !”

Mahomet grew pale and retreated, looking the drunkard full in the eye. This scene and other orgies degenerating into bloody quarrels in the camps resulted in the prohibition of fermented liquors and of gambling. The Arabians were in the habit of drinking a great deal, especially *nabidh*, a wine made of dates, more common than that of the grape. They made alcoholic drinks of honey, wheat and barley. To battle against this scourge, Mahomet took progressive measures. First the Koran forbade the faithful to come to prayer in a state of drunkenness ; then excessive wine-drinking was declared evil by the Prophet, who also said that such drinks had more disadvantages than advantages. After the scandal caused by Hamza, he said that spirits and games of chance were the creation of the devil who, by means of them, hoped to create discord amongst the faithful. Additional brawls having occurred under

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the influence of drink, Mahomet unconditionally forbade its use ; wine, gambling and sacrifice to the idols were the abominations to be avoided by good Mussulmans wishing to enter Paradise. The Prophet sent a herald through the streets of Medina to announce that both the drinking and the commerce of wine and fermented drinks were forbidden.

Anas ben Mâlik was offering some date wine to his uncles, Abu Talha, Obavy ben Ka'b and Abu 'Obaïda, as the herald passed in front of his house. "Come, Anas, pour all that out," said Abu Talha and, as an example, he spilled the contents of his cup. Then Anas emptied the wine-jars and the liquor ran down the street.

Several unimportant skirmishes took place in the course of the year. Abu Sofyan had taken a vow neither to perfume himself nor to approach his wives before giving battle to the Mussulmans. One day he went forth from Mecca with an escort of two hundred horsemen, approached Medina, passed the night in the *kasba* of a chief of the Jewish tribe of Banu Nadhir, burned some palm-trees near the city walls, killed two labourers and disappeared with the same rapidity with which he had come. Mahomet pursued him without, however, overtaking him. They found only some sacks of flour which the Qoraishites had left behind them at their camp. Hence this adventure is known as the *sawiq*, or the boiled dish, meaning that the flour had been intended for boiling into a sort of porridge.

A few days later Mahomet went to the well of El Qodr to disperse a gathering of the Banu Solaïm whose intentions were hostile. The Mussulmans arrived unexpectedly and were thus able to capture some flocks with their shepherds.

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The expedition of Bohrân was without results ; at Qarada they captured a caravan which the Qoraishites were sending to Irak, as the route to Syria was blocked by the Mussulmans. The tribes of the desert began to take sides either for or against the new power that had sprung up, and in consequence there were innumerable complicated intrigues. Mahomet ordered the killing of the Sheikh of the Banu Lihyan because he was preparing an expedition against him. This tribe had asked for some Mussulman missionaries. ‘Asim ben Thâbit went into their territory with ten men. Suddenly they were surrounded by two hundred horsemen of the Banu Lihyan riding at a gallop. ‘Asim and his companions, finding themselves in danger, took refuge on a little hill where, although soon surrounded, they refused to surrender.

“O Almighty God,” cried ‘Asim, as he fell pierced with arrows by the side of six other Mussulmans, “Send the news of our plight to your Prophet.”

The three survivors surrendered upon a promise to be spared. Their hands were tied behind their backs. One of them, refusing to march, had his throat cut on the spot. The two others were taken to Mecca and sold to the Qoraishites. One of them, Khobaïb, had killed El Harith at Badr. The son of the latter bought him from the Banu Lihyan Bedouins. He meant to kill him to “quiet the owl” hovering about the tomb of his father crying for vengeance. Chained in the house, the captive prepared to die stoically. The daughter of El Harith had lent him a razor and he was preparing his funeral-toilet by shaving his pubic hairs. At that moment the woman’s small child ran up to the prisoner and seated itself on his lap. The mother, happening to turn round,

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grew pale upon seeing Khobaib with the sharp-edged iron in one hand while holding the child with the other. Petrified with fright, she could not speak. But the prisoner saw the change come over her face.

“ So you are afraid I might cut your son’s throat ? ” he said. “ No, do not be afraid. I am not the sort of man who wreaks his vengeance on a child. ”

But his generosity did not save his life. They took him out of the *horm* so as not to slay him on hallowed ground. All the members of the avenging family were present. He asked for several minutes in which to pray, but prostrated himself only twice lest anyone attribute the length of his prayer to fear of death. And since that day Mussulmen pray thus when they are put to death in that way.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE JEWS

*The likeness of those who were charged with the observance of the law, and then observed it not, is as the likeness of an ass laden with books. . . . O ye who follow the Jewish religion, if ye say that ye are the friends of God above other men. . . .*

Koran, lxii, 5-6.

*Do ye therefore, whenever an apostle cometh unto you with that which your souls desire not, proudly reject him, and accuse some of imposture, and slay others.*

Koran, ii, 81.

THE victory at Badr had strengthened Mahomet's authority at Medina, but all opposition was not dead. After having borne it for long, he found himself sufficiently well entrenched if not to annihilate his enemies legally, at least to make way with the most dangerous amongst them. Besides, there had been plots for the assassination of the Prophet. Safwan ben Omayya had promised to pay the debts of 'Omaïr ben Wahb if he would kill Mahomet. This plot was unearthed by 'Omar and the would-be assassin begged for mercy and became a Mussulman.

The Jewish poetess, Asmâ bint Merwan, having written uncomplimentary verses about the Prophet, was killed during the night while she lay asleep

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amongst her children with the youngest at her breast. Old Abu 'Afak, who was one hundred and twenty years of age, paid with his life for verses he had written against the Moslem conception of a religious community as opposed to the traditional clan idea.

The Jews of Medina scarcely hid the sympathy they felt for the pagans of Mecca. As we have seen, one of their chiefs had received Abu Sofyan during the night, giving him information. As they did not know how to band together Mahomet was able to overcome them tribe by tribe. The first occasion came when a Mussulman was killed as the result of a fight in the market place of the Banu Qaïnoqa. The Jews of this tribe entrenched themselves in their quarter where the houses of several stories were close together and opened only on to an inner court closed by heavy doors, forming a real fortress.

"Be careful!" the Prophet cried to them. "God can send down upon you the same disasters as befell the Qoraishites. Become Mussulmans. You know that I am God's Messenger. You will find it written in your Scriptures. You must pay God generously."

"God must be poor indeed!" replied the Jews. "You are merely hunting an excuse for breaking your treaty with us. We do not like fighting. But do not be so sure, O Abulqasim, that because you have beaten your fellow-citizens easily, who are not in the habit of fighting, that the case would be the same with us."

They were then besieged for fifteen days during which time no help came to them, neither from the other Jewish tribes nor from their Arabian allies. They surrendered unconditionally and Mahomet, wishing to make an example of them, ordered that their hands be tied behind their backs and their heads

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cut off. The Banu Qaīnoqa had as allies the powerful Arabian tribes of the Khazraj, whose chief, 'Abdallah ben Obayy, succeeded, but not without much difficulty, in obtaining their grace.

Their lives were saved but they were obliged to exile themselves, going into Syria, leaving behind them their slaves, their lands and their outstanding debts, all of which were divided amongst the victors. Loading all they could upon their beasts, the Banu Qaīnoqa pushed northward, the men on foot, the women mounted on camels—a melancholy procession.

Ka'b ben el Ashraf was a rich Jew of Medina. He was a learned man, a rabbi, and a much esteemed poet in the Arabian tongue. Being a friend of the Qoraishites, he composed verses about the slain of Badr and then went to Mecca to recite his poems in order to arouse the populace. Life to him was no longer worth while, he said, after the disaster to the noblest Arabs, unless Mecca avenged herself. The Moslem poets having retorted, Ka'b returned to Medina and tried to incite the people to rebellion against the Prophet. To this end he wrote many biting satires.

"Who will deliver me of Ibn el Ashraf?" said Mahomet one day, growing impatient.

"Do you want me to kill him?" asked the *Ansari*, Mohammed ben Maslama.

"If you can. . . ."

Ka'b ben el Ashraf lived in a strong castle on the outskirts of Medina. It was not easy to penetrate. So the murderer resorted to trickery. Three other Mussulmans entered into the plot and they acquired as an accomplice the services of Silkan Abu Nāila, Ka'b's foster-brother.

Abu Nāila called on the Jewish poet one evening

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and spoke to him for a whole hour, by the light of the moon, of many indifferent things ; they recited verse, they joked. Finally, touching him on the shoulder, Abu Naila said :

“ Ka'b, I really came to see you about something serious. May I speak to you and rely absolutely on your discretion ? ”

“ Speak,” was the reply.

“ Very well. The arrival of that man (Mahomet) is a disaster. He has involved us with all the Arabs and our caravan routes have been cut off. He has divided our families and troubled our souls.”

“ I am Ibn el Ashraf ! By God ! Did I not warn you that things would come to this pass ? ”

“ I have friends who have the same ideas on this subject as I. What we need is a way of ridding our city of this man. But in the meantime our stores of wheat are low. Could you supply us with wheat against solid security ? ”

“ What security ? Would you offer your children as a guarantee ? ”

“ That would be ignominous. We can give you very valuable armour as security. I shall fetch it and the bargain will be made.”

Abu Naila then joined the conspirators who took the armour and went with him to the *kasba* of the Jew. Mahomet accompanied them for a time, then left them saying :

“ May Allah aid you ! ”

Ever and ever more brilliant, the moon rose in the heavens. The shadow of the castle lengthened—black against the silver ground. Abu Naila called Ka'b from the foot of the ramparts.

The poet had very recently married a charming young woman.

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“ Do not go out at this hour,” she said to him.

“ Why not ? ”

“ I beg of you, do not go out. It is midnight. You are a warrior and you have enemies.”

“ But it is Abu Naïla, almost my brother, who is calling.”

“ Ya Ka'b ! Ya Ka'b ! ” Silkan was calling.

“ Do you not hear his voice ? What can I fear from him ? ” And Ibn el Ashraf smiled at her fears because he saw in them a proof of her love, left his wife and joined the five men in the night. They walked about for a while, talking.

“ If we were to go to the Hill of the Old Woman ? . . . ” one of them ventured.

“ Yes, if you like,” said Ka'b.

The poet's hair had just been perfumed by his wife. “ I have the most perfumed, the most perfect wife in the whole of Arabia,” he declared all aglow.

“ Allow me to inhale the perfume of your hair,” said Abu Naïla as he touched Ka'b's hair and then sniffed his hand. “ Truly, I have never smelled anything so fragrant.”

They walked on slowly in the soft night air. Again Silkan inhaled the perfume with which Ka'b's hair was anointed and praised the elegance of the new husband. A third time he touched the head of the Jew with his hand, but this time he pulled fiercely at his hair, and cried aloud :

“ Strike this enemy of Allah with all your might ! ”

The Mussulmans unsheathed their swords, but their weapons crossed in the darkness and they only succeeded in wounding one of their own company. Ka'b let out a terrible cry ; Ibn Maslama had stabbed him in the heart with a dagger.

Ka'b's cry of terror had awakened the people in

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the neighbourhood, who came out of their tents while lights began to flicker along the ramparts of the castle tower. The murderers fled, trying to support their wounded comrade. Without being seen, they had to pass through the territory of several Jewish and Arabian tribes. The wounded man held them back. All the neighbourhood was in a state of excitement. They dropped their wounded comrade and ran to hide. At the end of an hour he joined them without having been seen. Then they carried him, and reached Mahomet's house at dawn, to find him praying. He listened to their adventure.

Another well-known and wealthy Jew, Abu Rafi', nicknamed the "Merchant of the Hijaz", lived in a castle near Khaïbar. He incited the Jews of that city and the tribe of Ghatafan against the Mussulmans. At the instigation of Mahomet five men of Khazraj, led by 'Abdallah ben 'Atiq, disguised themselves and went to Khaïbar. The Prophet had requested them to kill no women or children. When they reached the castle, 'Abdallah said to his companions :

"Wait here for me."

The door of the castle had not yet been closed, although night had come ; for the castle attendants were searching for a strayed donkey in the open with torches. 'Abdallah approached and pretended to be engaged in answering a call of nature.

"Those who want to enter must do so at once," called the gatekeeper, "for I am about to close the gates."

'Abdallah entered with the others and hid himself in a barn while the people in the castle dined. When they had all gone to bed he took the key of the entrance gate from its hiding-place in the dormer-window so as to be able to get out. Then he passed through several rooms to the bed-chamber.

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The master of the castle had dined well and lay sleeping beside his wife. The darkness was impenetrable.

“O Abu Rafi’ ! ” called ‘Abdallah.

“Who is there ? ”

‘Abdallah hurled his lance in the direction of the voice but missed his aim. The thick woollen garment that Abu Rafi’ wore protected him. The woman thought she recognized the voice of ‘Abdallah.

“It is not possible,” said her husband. “‘Abdallah is far from here.”

“O Abu Rafi’, what is that voice we hear and what does that cry mean ? ” said ‘Abdallah, changing his tone of voice.

“May the devil take you ! ” Abu Rafi’ cried to his wife. “There is a man in this room with us who wanted to strike me with his sword.”

Ibn ‘Atiq went forward and struck again in the darkness. He jumped back and it was then that he fell against Abu Rafi’ lying on his mattress. He thrust his sword into his belly till he heard the bones crack. Then he left the room, heeding the Prophet’s order not to kill women, and while the wife moaned and cried for help the murderer took to his heels. But how escape from an Arabian castle, which is a labyrinth of rooms, staircases and courtyards ? Abu Rafi’’s people were now moving about. They seemed to come from everywhere, to bump into each other, to cry aloud and light torches. The animals, herded together in the enclosure for the night, began to bleat and whinney. ‘Abdallah broke a leg in running down the stairs, but he bound his knee with the stuff of his turban and succeeded in escaping without being recognized.

In order to be certain that his victim had indeed

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succumbed, 'Abdallah sat near the door waiting for dawn to come. Then someone came out and called from the highest point of the outer wall :

"I announce the death of Abu Rafi', the Merchant of the Hijaz!" 'Abdallah then joined his comrades.

"Let us run," said he. "God has slain Abu Rafi'."

We should much prefer not to have to record such tales as these in the story of a man who had so often shown such greatness and nobility of soul. From the ordinary point of view Mahomet may be excused by saying that he was a product of his time and country ; but we cannot help wishing that the Prophet of Allah, the regenerator of his race, had been purer, more superhuman. We cannot but regret these deep shadows in an otherwise radiant picture.

While Mahomet was exceptionally severe with the Jews, it must be remembered that they had betrayed him and the anarchical state of Arabia must not be forgotten ; after such incidents it is difficult to see in him a perfect ideal in all things.<sup>1</sup> The Mussulmans were given to identifying their interests with God's to such an extent that not the slightest scruple seems to have entered their minds. Ka'b ben Mâlik and Hassân ben Thâbit wrote poems in honour of the murderers of Ibn el Ashraf. A miniature war, or rather a series of individual skirmishes, followed the assassination. A Mussulman having killed a Jew, his benefactor, was reproached by his pagan brother for his ingratitude :

"The food that he gave you is still in your stomach," he said.

<sup>1</sup> As certain modern apologists wish to claim. Cf. *Islamic Review*, 1917 : The Jewish prophet Elijah had four hundred and fifty priests of Baal massacred in a single day.

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“ By Allah ! ” was the reply, “ If he who ordered me to kill him commanded me to do the same to you, my brother, I would do so at once.”

A strange justification indeed ! Very much impressed by such enthusiasm, the pagan brother at once became a Mussulman.

The Jews were terrorized and at once signed an agreement with Mahomet promising not to attack him. It was not until after Ohod that they dared to raise their heads again. The Prophet gave up his Jewish secretaries, after which he had recourse chiefly to the services of Zaid ben Thâbit, whom he ordered to learn the language of the people of Aram.

The *qibla*, or direction of prayer, was no longer Jerusalem but the Ka‘ba of Mecca, the oratory of Abraham, the common ancestor of Jews, Christians and Mussulmans, to whom Mahomet traced the foundations of his teachings.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OHOD

*"War has its ups and downs."*

(Abu Sofyan, on the eve of the battle.)

AT the beginning of the month of Shawwal in the third year of the Hegira, Mahomet, who had gone to Quba, about an hour from Medina, saw an Arab coming towards him on an exhausted camel. The Arab asked for a secret interview.

"O Abu'lqasim," he said, "I have come from Mecca in five days to bring you important news. The brother of your father, El 'Abbas ben 'Abdelmottalib, who wishes you well, sent me to tell you that the Qoraishites are resolved to have done with you and avenge the dead of Badr. They will no longer bear with either the humiliation you have inflicted upon them or the damage done to their commerce by the destruction of the caravan-route to the country of the Rum. All their able-bodied men are armed. They have called upon the Banu Kinana and upon their allies of Tihama for aid. They have mobilized their Ahabish. Within a few days three thousand warriors, two hundred of whom have swift mounts and seven hundred of whom have coats of armour of either steel or leopard-skin, will fall upon Medina. Abu Sofyan himself is in command of this powerful army and 'Ikrima, who lives only to avenge his father, Abu Jahl, and the unconquerable Khalid ben el Walid are his chief captains."

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The scheming old El 'Abbas was indeed playing a double rôle. He had no enthusiasm for Islam, and once his ransom had been paid he hastened back to Mecca and his business affairs. But he wanted to prepare a way out for himself in case of need and to that end he curried favour with his nephew.

Mahomet hastily returned to Medina and called together the principal citizens. What ought they to do? The Prophet was of the opinion that it would be better to entrench themselves in the city. The older men approved of this plan, but the younger ones, enflamed with the memory of Badr, wanted to go before the enemy and give battle. The majority were of this opinion and Mahomet, as was usual when he did not have a revelation on a particular subject, agreed. He sent out heralds to call all to arms and then went home to his afternoon prayers with 'Omar and Abu Bakr, who dressed him in his double cuirass and wound his turban about his helmet. The banner, knotted to the standard, was set up to assemble the men. When Mahomet, fully armed, with lance in hand, sword at his side and shield hanging from his shoulder, reviewed his army, there were but a thousand men, only two hundred of whom had cuirasses, and only two horses. Even the most enthusiastic lost heart at the sight and began to talk of awaiting the attack within the shelter of the walls.

"No!" declared Mahomet, "it would not be seemly for a Prophet to put his sword back into its scabbard once he has drawn it out."

He gave the standard of the Mohajirûn to 'Ali, that of the Khazraj to Habbab and that of the Aws to Sa'd. The army advanced. They camped at a short distance from the city. At dawn on the following day they advanced again and said their morning prayers

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at Anjar. In reviewing his troops Mahomet noticed several Jews amongst the ranks of the Khazraj, their allies. Mahomet would not permit them to remain if they refused to become Mussulmans. They refused and departed. 'Abdallah ben Obayy, the "hypocrite", chief of the Khazraj, grew angry, and left with three hundred men. The army, now reduced to seven hundred men, advanced to Mt. Ohod after having killed another "hypocrite" who was working in a field and who had insulted the Prophet.

Six miles from the city Mt. Ohod rose steeply. The Mussulmans turned their backs to the mountain and faced Medina. Mahomet placed fifty archers in a gorge with orders not to move under any pretext. This was to prevent a surprise attack from behind.

Upon Mahomet's sword was inscribed: "Cowardice does not save one from fate." Not having the intention of taking an active part in the battle, Mahomet gave his sword to the *Ansari*, Abu Dujâna, who swore to use it until it bent. This man, wearing a red turban to indicate that he meant to fight till the bitter end, began to strut about so pompously that Mahomet said :

"Ah, this is a thing which would displease God under any other circumstance."

The Qoraishites arrived ; they placed themselves in such a way that one section of them stood between the Mussulmans and Medina. They had brought with them an idol in a *qubba*, carried on the back of a camel. Fifteen women gathered about this altar striking the *defs* and singing savage chants to encourage the warriors. The most celebrated amongst them was the beautiful and passionate Hind, the wife of Abu Sofyan, enraged because of the death of her father, 'Otba, and her brother.

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“ We are the daughters of the morning star,  
We walk upon delicate carpets,  
Pearls adorn our throats and our hair is perfumed with musk.  
If you fight bravely we shall embrace you,  
But if you turn your backs, we shall thrust you from us shamefully ! ”

Thus sang the Qoraishite women to the advance guard of the army. And they cried to the men :

“ Forward ! Strike firmly and spare no one !  
May your steel cut deep and your hearts remain inflexible ! ”

The Arabian warrior, as we have already said, is as careful as possible not to be killed. He considers war a profitable ruse and not a stupid massacre. On great occasions women were taken to the field of battle, for their songs and their shouts inspired the men with courage. Their presence was a sign that the men would fight to the very end.

Advancing from between the ranks of the Qoraishites came Abu 'Amir, former chief of the Aws Allah, a branch of the Aws, and a native of Medina, who had left his own city out of hatred for Mahomet. He was a sort of ascetic and had preached a religion half pagan, half Jewish, which had been eclipsed by Islam. He cried to those of his tribe amongst the ranks of the Mussulman army to come and join him. His appeal met with no success. He began to shoot his bow and, at the same time, the Qoraishite slaves hurled stones at the first rows of the Moslem army, and the horsemen of the left wing, led by 'Ikrima, tried to attack the flank of the army of Medina. The attack failing, Hamza, Mahomet's uncle, let out his great battle-cry : “ Death ! Death ! ” and charged the centre of the Qoraishite army.

The rush of the Mussulmans was irresistible. They made a great gap in the pagan army. Abu Dujâna,

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who held the Prophet's sword, found himself on the other side facing the Qoraishite women, who sought refuge on the hillside, expecting to be killed or taken prisoner. The warrior had already raised his arm above their heads, but decided that he could not soil the Prophet's sword with the blood of women. The idol had fallen from its palanquin. The Qoraishites had already entrenched themselves behind their three hundred baggage camels.

But the Mussulman archers, thinking victory at hand and forgetting Mahomet's order, came forth from their gorge and rushed into the fray, crying : "Booty ! Booty ! "

But Khalid ben el Walid, understanding the situation, at once called together the horsemen of the right wing of the Meccan army and took possession of the abandoned post, and across the hill shot at the Mussulmans from the rear. Then an indescribable confusion spread throughout the Moslem army : they attacked one another. Hodhaïfa saw his father El Yaman killed under his very eyes by error. The standard-bearer of the Qoraishites defied the Mussulmans with :

" You claim that your dead are in paradise. By El Lât ! you lie . . . If you really believed that, several of you would come forth to fight me ! "

'Ali heard him, threw himself at the foe ; felled him. But he did not deal the final blow for, in falling, the Qoraishite exposed the secret parts of his body and the modest young man turned his head away.

A Qoraishite woman, 'Amra bint 'Alkama el Harithia, took the flag from the hands of the fallen standard-bearer. Sawab, a young Abyssinian slave, then bore the banner. Sa'd ben Abi Waqqas cut off his right hand. He seized it with his left, but that in

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its turn was likewise cut off. He then gripped the standard under his arm. Literally hacked into morsels, he threw himself upon the banner to cover it, crying : "Have I done my duty?" and so died.

The poet of Medina, Hassân ben Thâbit, jeered at the Qorashites, whose honour had been defended by a woman and by a negro, without whom "they would have been sold in the market-place like any foreign merchandise".

Munafi ben Talha, who had recaptured the ancient banner of old Qusay, fell pierced by an arrow. (His mother swore to drink from the skull of her son's murderer and promised a hundred camels to anyone who would bring it to her.) His brothers Harith and Kelab succeeded him, then four other Qoraishite nobles, but all were killed.

The Prophet stood beside Sa'd ben Abi Waqqas, a skilful archer. Mahomet handed him the arrows and praised his skill. The Mussulman women dashed about the field of battle carrying water-jugs to the warriors and the wounded on their backs, their skirts tucked up so that the bangles on their legs showed flashing. Omm Aîman, a woman-servant of Mahomet's, had her dress pierced by an arrow and fell over in fright, her legs in the air. Annoyed, Mahomet handed an arrow without a point to Sa'd, and Sa'd repeated the trick on the enemy. Mahomet laughed.

Several Mussulmans had drunk wine (complete prohibition not having yet been proclaimed) to give themselves courage. Others were drunk with religious fervour or the ardour of the battle. Two old men, unknown to the others, joined the combatants so as to earn a martyr's palm. They threw themselves into the thickest of the battle and were killed, one by the

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enemy and the other by the Mussulmans who did not recognize him.

Anas ben en Nadhr, who had not participated in the battle of Badr and wanted to make up for it, said to some Mussulmans who were fleeing :

“ Where are you going ? It is here that you will breathe the perfume of paradise.” His body was later found torn by eighty wounds, and so mutilated that his sister was able to recognize him only by a beauty spot and the tips of his fingers.

The situation became acute and the Mussulmans were at a disadvantage because of numbers. ‘Othman, and perhaps Abu Bakr and ‘Omar themselves, turned tail and ran without stopping until they reached Medina, where they spread consternation. There remained only a dozen men around the Prophet to protect him. A women, Nasiba bint Ka’b, who had dropped her water-jug to fight near the Prophet with her husband and her sons, seized the shield of a fugitive and defended the ground step by step, although she was wounded thirteen times. Her son was struck by her side. She bound his wound and sent him back to fight.

But there were others who showed a less religious spirit.

A man of Medina, who had remained in the city and joined the army later only to escape the sarcasm of the women, fought courageously and, when they complimented him on his spirit of *martyrdom*, said frankly :

“ It is for no religion that I have fought—only to keep the people of Mecca from touching the date-trees of Medina.” And not having the courage to endure the frightful pain from his wounds he stabbed himself with his own sword, which inspired the Prophet

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to say that one must wait until the very end before judging people by their acts.

Half a century later, two men passed through Homs in Syria. "It is here," they said, "that Wahshi (the savage) lives. Let us make him relate how he killed Hamza, Mahomet's uncle, at the battle of Ohod."

They asked where he lived.

"He is a man who has been conquered by wine," was the reply. "You will see him sitting in his doorway. If he has been drinking you will get nothing out of him ; but if he is sober he will talk as much as you like."

At the indicated house the two travellers found an old negro, bent but still very tall, with white hair, drawn features and wrinkled face. He had an expression like that of an old eagle—sharp but weary. He raised his head at their greeting.

"Are you not 'Obaïdallah ben 'Adi ?" he asked one of the travellers. "I held you in my arms when you were a babe at the breast and I recognize you by the shape of your heel."

"It is indeed I. We have come to hear you tell us how you killed Hamza ben 'Abdelmottalib."

"I shall tell you the story as I used to tell it to the Prophet himself. I was then the slave of Jubaïr ben Mut'im, whose uncle had been killed by Hamza. He promised to free me if I killed Hamza. During the whole of the battle of Ohod, I was only interested in killing Hamza. When I saw him, he was being challenged by Siba', whose mother circumcises the women of Mecca.

"'O Siba', ' he cried to him, 'O son of Omm Anmar, circumcisor of women, do you still remain

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unfaithful to God and his Prophet ?' And he killed him with a single blow of his sabre. I was in ambush behind a stone with my javelin in my hand. Just as he bent over to cut off the head of Siba', I threw my javelin ; I seldom miss my aim. It struck him in the crotch and the tip came out at the back between his buttocks. He staggered and fell. I pulled out my javelin and left. After the taking of Mecca I was converted to Islam and took part in the holy war ; I tried to be forgiven for the murder of Hamza by killing Musailima, the impostor, at the battle of Yamama."

The Qoraishites tried now to kill Mahomet himself. Mus'ab ben Omaïr, who was Mahomet's personal standard-bearer, was killed before his eyes. As he closely resembled Mahomet, the enemy thought that they had indeed killed the Prophet and started to shout the news, which threw complete disorder into the Mussulman ranks. Mâlik ben El Aswam, while in flight, passed near Kharja, who lay dying of ten wounds, announcing the news.

"Even though Mahomet be dead," said the dying man, "God, the Highest, the most Glorious, lives always. Return to the fight in Allah's name."

Four pagans were hurling stones at the little group surrounding the Prophet. One of the stones struck the Prophet in the face with such force that he fell backward. His lip had been cut open by the stone. Wiping the blood away with his mantle and sighing, he said :

"Can it be that there are people so savage as to demand the blood of the Prophet who calls them to God ?" An arrow-head struck him in the cheek ; the pain was intense. Retreating with those about him and encumbered with the weight of the heavy

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armour which had saved him from death, Mahomet fell into a ditch. Talha jumped into the ditch and lifted the Prophet upon his shoulder, while 'Ali pulled him by the arms. Retreating and fighting at the same time, they finally gained the summit of a mountain-pass where many of the others had sought refuge. Abu Dujâna bent over the Prophet, serving as a living shield, while Abu 'Obaïda bound his wounds. The chin-straps of his helmet had entered into the flesh and they had much difficulty in releasing them from the torn skin. When Abu 'Obaïda finally pulled them out two teeth dropped from Mahomet's jaw. Mâlik ben Sinan sucked the blood that flowed, and Fâtima, shortly after, washed her father's jaw with water that 'Ali fetched in his shield. To stop the flow of blood and close the wound, Fâtima burnt a mat and daubed the wound with the ashes.

A Qoraishite horseman, Ibn Khalaf, passing there and seeing the Prophet still alive, threw himself upon him ; but the Prophet seized a lance and pierced him through.

The fight was over and the Qoraishites were masters of the field, but instead of taking advantage of the situation, they preferred to gratify their hatred by pillaging the dead bodies and burying their own dead, of which there were one third as many as those of the enemy. The women came to insult the dead Mussulmans. They cut off their noses and ears to make necklaces, bracelets and belts. Hind, in ferocious exultation, cut open Hamza's body and tore out his liver, which she bit into shreds with her handsome teeth.

Abu Sofyan ran about the battle-field hoping to find Mahomet's body ; he recognized that of his own son, Handhala, killed amongst the ranks of the

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Mussulmans. He then advanced towards the summit where the Prophet stood with his twelve faithful followers.

“ Is Mahomet with you ? ” he cried.

Mahomet forbade them to answer.

“ And Abu Bakr, is he there ? And ‘Omar ? ”

The Mussulmans did not speak.

“ Then they are dead,” said Abu Sofyan.

“ You lie ! ” called out one of the Prophet’s companions, who could no longer contain himself.

“ In any case, the victory is ours,” replied the Qoraishite.

“ To us alone, *insh’ Allah.* ”

“ All days are not alike. To-day makes up for Badr. War has its ups and downs. You will find the bodies of your dead mutilated. I did not order that. So much the worse. . . . I invite you to meet me again next year at the well of Badr so that we may measure our strength again.” And the Qoraishites began to intone a chant composed in the *rajaz* metre :

“ Be praised, O Hobal, be praised. Thy religion has triumphed.”

“ God is the greatest and most magnificent,” answered the Mahometans.

“ We have El ‘Ozza and you have not El ‘Ozza,” continued Abu Sofyan.

And the Prophet said to his people :

“ Have you no answer to that ? ”

“ What shall we say, O Messenger of God ? ”

“ Say : ‘ God is our protector and you have no protector ’.”

The Qoraishites departed without pursuing the routed army and the Mussulmans returned to the field of battle. Upon seeing the mutilated body of his uncle, Mahomet, in a moment of rage, swore to

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do as much to the body of seventy pagans. But an angel brought him the following revelation :

*“ You may inflict reprisals but you would do better to be patient.”*

“ I shall therefore exercise patience,” said Mahomet, giving up the idea of vengeance, and he was consoled upon learning from the Angel Gabriel that Hamza had been admitted into the Seventh Heaven with the glorious title of “ Lion of Allah and of his Prophet ”.

They buried the dead two by two (there were about seventy of them) at the place where they had submitted to their martyrdom.

“ *Allahu akbar, God is greatest,*” said Mahomet over their bodies, and he promised to be their witness on the Day of Judgment.

He forbade them to wash the bodies, for martyrs must appear before God with their wounds perfumed and bright with vermillion blood. He permitted them to weep for the dead, for tears soothe the heart, but he forbade them to tear their hair, cut their cheeks, rend their garments or give themselves over to any theatrical manifestations of grief.

What remained of the Mussulman army was worn with fatigue, and prayed that night seated. The night was one of anxiety for, apart from the pain of defeat, there was the uncertainty of what the victor might do. The next day Mahomet manoeuvred in the direction of Medina. Abu Sofyan did not dare to attack him, fearing that he might receive reinforcements from the city and therefore took the road to Mecca ; but on the next day, a Monday, he halted, changed his mind and decided to return to annihilate his enemies. But Mahomet was decisive. In spite of his wounds and the minority of his troops, he

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pursued the Qoraishites to Hamra El Asad, where he remained for four days facing the enemy, lighting fires at night to signify that he did not mean to give up the struggle. The enemy again took the road to Mecca. Mahomet and his army returned to Medina, where a difficult situation had arisen.

His enemies had raised their heads. Jews and "hypocrites" laughingly declared that defeat had weakened his mission. Badr had been considered as a proof of Mahomet's divine mission ; by the same lights Ohod showed that Mahomet was only an ordinary general and not a Prophet. 'Abdallah ben Obayy was so biting that the faithful chased him from the mosque and Mahomet had to use his influence to prevent violence being used on him. The Koran declares that fortune varies in order that God may recognize the pure ; that the Mussulmans were humbled as a punishment for having sometimes preferred the goods of this world to future rewards. It was their disobedience towards the Prophet and their love of booty that had been the cause of their defeat. It was in God alone that they should have had faith ; not in themselves.

Mahomet, who had shown audacity and decision the day after his defeat by pursuing the enemy army, doubled his activities after Ohod. He determined to keep a firm hold on Medina and to see that his troops were in training. He organized a body of cavalry, established breeding-stables and even forbade mules to be bred in order to have more horses.

Abu Barra', the chief of the Banu 'Amir, made advances to Mahomet. He alternated flattery and presents with disguised menaces. He wanted an alliance that would assure him the domination of the region of Nejd. A number of Moslem horsemen went

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into Nejd where the “native politics” were extremely complicated. Abu Barra’s rôle in the affair is not very clear. He gave them a safe conduct and perhaps wanted to make use of them against his rival, Ibn Tofail, chief of the Banu Solaïm. But the fact is that the latter, with a single stroke of his lance, killed the leader of the Mussulman expedition and then tried to incite the Banu ‘Amir to massacre the others. But the Banu ‘Amir refused to perform this act of treason, whereupon the Banu Solaïm fell upon the Mussulmans, who were gathered at the well of Bir Ma’una and massacred all of them but a cripple who, at the moment of the attack, was looking after the camels and so was able to fly to the mountains.

This incident was a disaster not only because of the numbers of the dead (more than at the battle of Badr and almost as many as at Ohod), but because of the blow it dealt to Mahomet’s prestige amongst the Bedouin tribes. Mahomet was overcome with grief, hurled imprecations at the traitors and went into pious retreat for a month.

After this catastrophe came another. Two Mussulmans, while passing Bir Ma’una, saw the vultures flying over their dead and vowed vengeance. One of them killed two Jews, mistaking them for enemies ; Mahomet was obliged to pay blood-money.

In the course of negotiations on this subject with the Banu Nadhir of Medina, Mahomet thought that they were meditating some sort of treason. They had already plotted against him and Mahomet had long since decided to expel them from Medina, but the battle of Ohod had retarded the matter.

Suddenly leaving the meeting, he returned to his house and armed his people. Then he sent the Banu Nadhir an order to leave the country within ten days.

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The Jews hesitated ; then encouraged by 'Abdalah ben Obayy, the "hypocrite", they refused. Mahomet besieged them in their *kasba* three leagues from Medina and burned their palm-groves. The Banu Nadhir waited in vain for the promised aid of Ibn Obayy and were obliged to surrender after six days. They were allowed to leave, taking with them all they could load on the backs of their camels. Their other possessions and their arms were confiscated. As the booty had not been taken by force after a combat the Koran decided that it belonged to the Prophet, who divided it amongst the Mohajirûn, emigrated from Mecca so that they would no longer have to live on the charity of the people of Medina.

With their women and children and even parts of their dwellings loaded on six hundred camels, the Banu Nadhir took the route going north. In their yellow robes loaded down with trimmings, the young girls followed the caravan dancing and singing, playing the flute and the tambourine to show that they were not sorry to leave the country. Thus the procession passed through the market-place of Medina. Some of them went as far as Syria, while others stopped at Khaïbar, a large oasis populated by Jews about half the distance.

Mahomet did not forget either the affair of 'Asim ben Thâbit nor that of Bir Ma'una. He wanted to give the Bedouins a lesson and the Koran denounced their native tendency to treachery and pillage. He left Medina suddenly and went into Nejd by forced marches. The heat was stifling. They took turns riding the camels and those walking bound their feet with rags so as to keep them from being burned by the scorching sand and cut by the jagged stones. Abu Musa's feet were so injured that the nails dropped

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off. Five times daily the little army stopped to pray. When they arrived in the danger zone Mahomet instituted the "danger prayer": the company in turn placed itself behind the Prophet and prayed in the direction of Mecca, bowing but once, while the others faced the enemy (present or potential). Sometimes they prayed on horseback. The sky was the immeasurable dome of the earth which these primitive and simple men wished to turn into the temple of God. They rendered homage to him with death threatening them, so transfigured were they by the faith of their chief, who was so ardent, that even in this small, deserted corner of the world, between two ridiculous skirmishes, between two exhausting marches or two raids, he was preparing to change the face of the world.

Thanks to the speed with which they had come, the Mussulmans fell upon a party of Banu Ghatafan, who fled to the mountains, leaving behind them their baggage and some captives.

While returning to Medina, Mahomet fell asleep one hot day under a mimosa tree. He had hung his sabre on the tree. It was a beautiful Syrian weapon with a hilt of engraved silver. Suddenly he awoke and saw before him a stranger brandishing his sword and crying :

"Who will protect you now against me?"

"God," replied Mahomet coolly, looking him full in the face.

Very much impressed the Bedouin let the weapon fall. Mahomet picked it up and threatened the man, saying :

"And who will save *you* now?"

"Alas! No one," groaned the Bedouin.

"Very well, learn pity from my God. . . ."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE DITCH

*There were the faithful tried,  
and made to tremble with a violent  
trembling. . . . God hath driven  
back the infidels in their wrath :  
they obtained no advantage . . .*

Koran, xxxiii.

FTER the battle of Ohod, Abu Sofyan, singing his song of triumph, invited Mahomet to meet him at the market place of Badr the following year (according to the tacit agreement between the Mussulmans and the Qoraishites). The date of the meeting approached ; Mahomet departed with fifteen hundred men, but the enemy was not at the appointed place ; a famine in Mecca had prevented the idolaters from coming. The Mussulmans, however, contented themselves with doing business at the *sug* for they had been farseeing enough to bring certain merchandise with them . . .

But the war soon recommenced. The Qorashites allied themselves to the Jews and the Bedouins, and their formidable coalition was preparing to deal a decisive blow to Islam. The Banu Nadir who had taken refuge at Khaïbar incited their hosts against the new power that had risen threatening all anarchistic Arabia ; they represented Mahomet as a tyrant waiting to put all the tribes into chains. The Bedouins of Tihama and of Nejd joined the Qoraishites in a

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body and the confederation had spies in the very heart of Medina amongst the Jews of the Banu Qoraïda who desired, almost openly, the ruin of their burdensome ally.

In the month of Shawwal of the fifth year of the Hegira, the allies, numbering ten thousand, marched against Medina, where there were but three thousand men to oppose them. Never before in the Hijaz had there been seen such a large army.

To advance against such a force would have meant to risk another Ohod. Mahomet did not wish to fight in a large, open, flat space because of the superior numbers of his enemy who, in addition, counted on the help of some of the inhabitants of Medina : the Jews and the "hypocrites". Medina was prepared for a state of siege and the women and children had been placed in the fortified sections. Selman the Persian suggested their digging around the city an enormous ditch which would paralyse the advance of their assailants. The idea was altogether a new one in Arabia and caused much astonishment. But with tactical genius Mahomet at once appreciated the value of a project which permitted the effective defence of a city composed of separate quarters. He had to employ all his influence to have them accept this strange system of fighting and to persuade the Mussulmans to undertake the humiliating toil of digging out the earth. He himself set the example.

On an icy winter morning, the digging was begun. Mahomet, half naked, transported the rubble on his back. On his white chest, now smeared with earth, could be seen a thin line of hairs, as if drawn with a reed, from his throat to his navel. And as he worked he sang in *rajaz* metre the verses of 'Abdallah ben Rawâha : "By Allah ! without Allah we would never

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have found the right road : we would have known neither charity nor prayer. Let peace descend upon us and strengthen our footsteps should we meet the enemy. Surely, if those who attack us want us to revolt we shall refuse." And he raised his voice :

" We shall refuse ! We shall refuse ! "

His example persuaded the others. When he passed with a heavy basket of earth on his shoulder the disciples, suffering from hunger and fatigue, cheered him, crying :

" We have sworn fidelity to you and to Islam, O Mahomet, as long as life remains in us ! "

" O, my God ! " said he, " Bless the *Ansar* and the *Mohajirūn* ! The only good is in the life to come."

He made every effort to keep up their courage, turning their miseries into jokes. When Jabir brought some barley which was being cooked in some rancid fat that gave off an unpleasant smoke, Mahomet called out :

" Oh ! There, you of the ditch ! Here is Jabir inviting you to a feast. Come quickly."

The enemy approached. Even the most faithful trembled, their hearts in their mouths. They asked themselves where God's aid was. And the " hypocrites " protested :

" Mahomet promised us the treasures of Cæsar and of Chosroes," said one of them, " and look at us ; we cannot even go out to perform our needs without risking our lives."

Several of them left the army under the pretext of having to defend their houses in the surrounding districts. Although they had promised to fight with him, Mahomet let them go ; for he knew well that some of them were only waiting for an occasion to turn against him or to provoke disturbances in the city.

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He likewise knew that those who showed so little ardour for the battle and wanted so much to betray him would be the most exacting when it came to the sharing of the spoils. (Koran, xxxiii, 19.)

The trench had scarcely been finished when the enemy appeared. Mahomet placed his three thousand men behind the trench, having left Medina in command of the blind but faithful Ibn Omm Maktum.

Abu Sofyan and his men advanced but stopped, disconcerted, before the ditch and the hail of arrows with which the Mussulmans greeted them. The idolaters then pitched camp and the siege began. They remained thus, face to face, for almost a month without any encounter, hurling Homeric insults at each other across the ditch. Both night and day the Mussulman horsemen rode around the ditch on the lookout for surprise attacks. The situation, if prolonged, might have become serious, the more so because the Banu Qoraïdha had allied itself with the enemy. Mahomet wanted to use diplomacy and break up the alliance by negotiating separately with the Ghatafan. He proposed giving them a third of the date-harvest of Medina if they would depart.

“ Does that idea come from God or from you ? ” asked Sa’d ben Mo’adh, the chief of the Aws, as this plan was being discussed in a council of war.

“ If that order had come from God, ” retorted Mahomet, “ I would not ask your advice ; but I see that all the Arabs are aiming at us from the same bow and I should like to break up their alliance. ”

“ O Messenger of Allah ! ” said Sa’d, “ when we were pagan like these Banu Ghatafan, they did not eat a single one of our dates without paying for them ; but now that we have become ennobled by

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Islam we give them our dates for nothing . . .  
By Allah ! We shall give them nothing but sabre  
thrusts ! ”

Sa'd's ardour was soon put to the test. Several Qoraishites, amongst whom were 'Ikrima, the son of Abu Jahl, Nawfal and 'Amr, uncles of the deceased Khadija, found a spot where the ditch was narrower than at the other points and, digging the spurs into their horses' flanks, they leaped across the ditch. Then they challenged the Moslem champions to combat. 'Amr pranced up and down on his horse, Malhub, whose head was ornamented with a shining mirror, and 'Amr sang : “ When I mount Malhub I am invincible.”

‘Ali came forth.

“ Who are you ? ” cried the Qoraishite

“ ‘Ali ben Abi Tâlib.”

“ What do you want ? ”

“ To kill you.”

“ I should be sorry to kill a child like you.”

“ I should not be sorry to kill you. If you wish to fight it must be on foot.”

‘Amr dismounted ; then with a blow of his sabre he cut through his horse's knee saying : “ Now, I cannot take refuge in flight. I am about to free humanity of you, you scourge ! ”

They fought for a long time in a cloud of dust. ‘Ali, fired by his youth, gave powerful blows with his sword but it was no easy task to triumph over the seasoned champion who was his rival.

“ Did you not say that you would have no one come to your aid ? ” ‘Ali said suddenly.

“ Why do you ask me that ? ” asked the other with surprise.

“ Because your son is coming to help you.”

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‘Amr turned round and ‘Ali, seeing that his trick had succeeded, cut off ‘Amr’s leg.

“O Ali,” cried ‘Amr, reproachfully, “you have resorted to a ruse.”

“War is a ruse.”

‘Amr seized the severed leg and threw it at ‘Ali, who thrust his sword into ‘Amr’s chest.

Sa’d ben Mo‘adh was seriously wounded. The Qoraishites had recrossed the ditch, but, in doing so, Nawfal, miscalculating, fell into the ditch where a shower of stones rained upon him.

“At least kill me with the sword,” he cried.

‘Ali heard him, jumped into the ditch where, with one blow, he sent his head rolling ; then he pursued ‘Ikrima and succeeded in anchoring a javelin in his loins.

‘Omar, who was engaged in pursuing and insulting the idolaters, did not say his afternoon prayers until the setting of the sun.

“I did not say my prayers at all,” said Mahomet to him.

The allies, becoming discouraged, spoke of retreating, but the Jews of the Banu Qoraïdha, terrified at the idea of finding themselves alone to face Mahomet’s vengeance, held them back assuring them that with the aid of some troops they could surprise the city of Medina at night. But Mahomet sent reinforcements to the city in time and once more carried on his plan of breaking up the alliance amongst his enemies. He sent a Ghatafan deserter to the enemy camp for this purpose, who advised the Banu Qoraïdha to demand hostages of the Qoraishites before openly taking up arms against Mahomet and at the same time he told the Qoraishites that the Jews meant to betray them by taking hostages whom they meant to turn over to the Mussulmans.

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And, as a matter of fact, when Abu Sofyan sent the Jews word to prepare for a general assault, they replied asking for hostages and said that they could not fight on the day of the Sabbath. And so, convinced of their perfidy, the idolaters did not dare undertake the attack. On the other hand they had great trouble in obtaining food and especially forage for their animals.

Then there came violent and icy winds and one of those downpours of rain characteristic of the Arab winter. In a few minutes the camp of the allies was in complete disorder. Tents were uprooted and blown a considerable distance, fires were extinguished, pots were overturned, and the horses and camels scattered. Panic reigned. Physical disorder was added to spiritual tumult.

“This is the work of the angels,” Mahomet declared.

“This is the work of the demons,” thought the Bedouins.

Mussulman spies added to the general confusion. The nomads had no thought but of flying the accursed spot, sending Medina, the Mussulmans and their Prophet to the devil. Abu Sofyan, finding himself powerless to restore order and not wanting to remain alone with the Qoraishites, gave the command to retreat. Thus ended the Battle of the Ditch (*el Khandaq*) almost without combat and with but few victims (three pagans and six Mussulmans being the total casualties)—thus ended this war of the “confederated nations” intended to annihilate Islam for ever.

“They will not attack us again,” said Mahomet, “but the next time we shall attack them on their own ground.”

After so much excitement the people of Medina

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longed for rest, but Mahomet did not see matters in that light. As he was perfuming himself the morning of the departure of the enemy, he thought he heard the voice of the Angel Gabriel say :

“ You have hung up your arms, but I—I have not hung up mine.”

“ Where, then, should we attack ? ”

“ On this side,” and the Angel, well-known, it is said, for his anti-Jewish sentiments, pointed to the *kasba* of the traitorous Banu Qoraïdha.

That very evening Mahomet directed operations against this tribe and the next day they were surrounded in their fortress. Mahomet began to hurl invectives at them.

“ O Abu'lqasim,” they said, “ until this moment you have abstained from insults. What prompts you to begin to-day ? ”

Mahomet was so moved at this, that his lance fell from his hand and cloak from his shoulders. Then 'Ali called to the besieged that there would be an assault without mercy, but they defended themselves valiantly for twenty-five days. At last when there remained nothing but surrender, the Aws of Medina, their allies, asked for them the same conditions that had been accorded the Banu Nadhir by the intercession of the Khazraj. It was decided that their fate should be determined by Sa'd ben Mo'adh, chief of the Aws. The Jews hoped for a favourable decision from this ally of theirs, but Mahomet knew that Sa'd, who had been seriously wounded at the Battle of the Ditch, considered the Jews as the cause of this war and meant to make them pay.

Fat Sa'd arrived, mounted on his donkey, leaning against a cushion of leather and supported by a man on either side.

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“Have pity on us,” groaned the frightened Jews.  
“Be merciful towards your allies.”

“No one shall ever have the right to say that I have given an unjust sentence,” he declared, gravely. And approaching the Prophet, he cried: “These men should be put to death, their possessions confiscated, their wives and their children sold into slavery.”

“Your judgment has been inspired by the Seventh Heaven,” said Mahomet, and he had the defeated men put into chains and thus brought to Medina.

They passed the night in an enclosure where they could eat the dates that were brought them only by snatching at them, like beasts, dragging themselves on their bellies. They remained thus during three days while their belongings were being transported to Medina. Then a great hole was dug in one of the squares. Mahomet seated himself on the edge of this hole and called Zubair and ‘Ali to execute the condemned. One after the other, between six and seven hundred men had their throats cut; there was even one woman amongst them who had killed the only Mussulman victim by throwing a stone from a terrace. Thabit obtained grace for one of the condemned who, in former days, had saved his life, but when the man asked his protector what had become of this and that one of his relatives, and the reply invariably being, “He is dead,” he asked Thabit for one more favour: to send him to join his relatives. Thabit fulfilled his wish, cutting off his head with his own hands.

‘Ali and Zubair spent the whole day killing; their horrible task was finished by the light of torches at night, while Mahomet sat on the edge of the ditch and the Jewish women wept.

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The booty, besides the houses and land, comprised furniture, animals, three hundred cuirasses, one thousand lances and five hundred javelins, which were divided amongst the victors, the Prophet retaining a fifth for the poor, for his family and for the community. The horsemen, now numbering thirty-six, had a larger share than the others. The women and children were sold in Nejd as slaves and the proceeds went for the purchase of arms. Mahomet took as part of his share a captive named Rihâna, whom he made his concubine, but she remained for so long a Jewess that he tired of her.

Sa'd ben Mo'adh died of his wound, which opened again several days later, but Mahomet assured everyone that he had gone to paradise. And the Koran celebrates this conquest (xxxiii, 26, 27) just as the Bible celebrates that of Canaan.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### RASÙL ALLAH

*As for me I only know what God has taught me.* Koran.

*The king and his subjects, the sultan and the beggar, the wise and the ignorant, are all equal before the mission of these men.*

Sheikh Mohammed 'Abdu, Risalat.

*There is no religion based on falsehood.* Ballanche.

*If such be Islam, are we not all Mussulmans?* Goethe.

THE history of humanity hinges on men who have felt the "call", and on decisive moments which, had they been otherwise, would have altered the pages of history. From time to time a cry is heard, a cry in the night, a voice breaking the silence. A man awakes with a start ; he goes forth, he knows not where, like Elijah, like Abraham flying from burning Chaldea. And he goes for ever forward, without respite, calling to the others until he awakens them from their heavy sleep.

By a series of free acts, the salvation of humanity is thus assured and the road is kept in repair by the ministry of martyrs and saints. Thus arose Mahomet

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to call his race to the only religion of the Only God ; to arouse a portion of Asia and Africa, to liberate all those who understood his message from the slavery of a false doctrine, to stir up drowsy Persia and to breathe vigour into the Oriental Christians whose faith lay lifeless through speculations without fervour and lack of union.

Prophets are sent into the world exactly as the great forces of nature, both beneficial and terrible in their effects. They are like the sun and the rain, the winter tempests in Arabia that tear up the soil only to cover it again with a carpet of greenery in a few days' time. We must judge them by their fruits. The best fruits are hearts and minds that have been pacified, wills that have been strengthened, pains borne with patience, moral illnesses that have been cured, and prayers which have mounted to the pristine heavens.

Although alone, without moral or material support, opposed by the earthly spirit, prophets carry with them the secret of the greatest liberation ; for it is better to disobey man than to disobey God before whom all are equal, and should bow down ; the spirit should be given preference over the letter. Ignorant of all things save absolute truths, not so much illiterate as pure, natural and supernatural, freed from all prejudices, inspired either by the intelligence or the heart, a perfect prophet and simple soul stepped forth to explain to the learned what they had been discussing, to straighten out the tortuous roads in which the so-called wise men had lost their way. In listening to this Prophet's inspired discourse and his parables suited to the period, men again felt themselves in contact with surrounding mysteries, humbled themselves before God and learned how to arrange their fleeting lives so as to either satisfy or disobey him, therein

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finding a living rule such as neither the advice of philosophers nor heads of state could give. Mahomet appeared on the scene at one of the darkest periods in all history, when all the civilizations, from Merovingian Gaul to India, were falling to ruin or were in a state of troubled gestation.

He closely resembled his Hebrew predecessors ; Prophet (*nabi*) at Mecca as was Isaiah in Israel, judge at Medina as was Joshua in Canaan. He took the title of " Mohammad ", the glorified. He declared himself the *ummi* prophet, that is to say, the apostle of the gentiles, sent to the pagan Arabs.

Mahomet considered himself as the passive instrument of revelation. His whole ambition was to be an attentive clerk, a recording machine, almost a phonograph, faultlessly reproducing the words coming from the mouth of the luminous shadow. These words were the earthly form of the everlasting, the eternal, the uncreated Word of God, the " Mother of the Book " preserved in the Seventh Heaven by ecstatic angels. Of the difference between the divine Koran and the Koran engraved on the memory of men, written on leaves, on bark or on the scapulas of sheep, between the eternal Word and the temporal Word, we are able to judge with more " relativity " than were the contemporaries of the Prophet, or the Moslem theologians. And so we see the Koran carefully adapt itself to suit the circumstances, revealed day by day, according to the need for action and the interests of Islam, annulling and sometimes contradicting itself, changing its decisions to meet the objections and weaknesses of the faithful. But to the eyes of the Prophet himself the message came before the messenger. " A simple verse of the Book of God is worth more than Mahomet and all his family."

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Every Prophet must furnish a proof of his divine mission : a miracle of a special nature (*mu'jiza*) as distinguished from the miracles of the saints (*karama*), a miracle that brings with it a challenge. Moses challenged the magicians of Pharaoh to perform wonders comparable to his, and so he bent the stubborn Hebrew people under the flaming rod of his miracles. "Never has a man spoken as does this man," they said of Jesus.

The Koran is the only miracle performed by Mahomet. Its literary beauty, its irradiation, an enigma even to-day, have the power of putting those who recite it into a state of fervour, even if they are the least pious. And Mahomet defied either man or *jinn* to produce anything comparable ; this was the proof that he offered of the authenticity of his mission. It is not a question of exceptional literary value. Mahomet despised poets and did not want to be ranked with them.. This was altogether another thing ; the difference between an inspiration coming from God or from the *jinn*. There is little doubt that each verse, even though it is related to some insignificant thing in his private life, shook him profoundly to the depths of his soul. Undoubtedly, too, it is there that one should look for the secret of his influence and his prodigious success.

To-day we cannot question his sincerity. His whole life, in spite of his faults (and he did not deny having faults), proves that he believed profoundly in his mission and that he accepted it heroically as a burden of which he was to bear the heaviest portion. His creative ability and the vastness of his genius, his great intelligence, his sense of the practical, his will, his prudence, his self-control and his activity—in short, the life he led—make it impossible to take this inspired mystic for a visionary epileptic.

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He never for an instant asked himself whether his chances of convincing people would not be greater if he adjusted his words to the mentality of his audience. It was certainly not with soft words that he made converts, but in presenting his brilliant message in all its vigour, simple and sharp as the edge of a sword, a message which he carefully distinguished from his personal views. If at Medina he was no longer the humble and patient Prophet of Mecca it is because the circumstances were no longer the same ; had he remained the same outwardly, his essential character would have had to change. The *man* may have been sometimes blameworthy or weak, for action is a difficult test of purity, but the *prophet* remained sincere and unchanged. He may have sinned, but he did not lie. How can we imagine a man in whose eyes success appeared only as a divine confirmation suddenly becoming a liar (and surely there can be no question of his sincerity at the beginning of his career) ? And how could he have dared to debase his mission at the very moment when he believed it to be confirmed ?

The very faults of the Prophet prove that his unique and real grandeur came from God, from his supernatural inspiration. Without God he felt himself alone and weak.

“ O God,” he prayed in the night, “ do not let me fall again. Do not abandon me for a single moment.”

“ Why do you speak so ? ” asked his wife, Omm Selma, “ when God has forgiven you your sins past and future ? ”

“ O Omm Selma, how can I be safe when God once abandoned the Prophet Jonah ? O my God, pardon me my sins, past and present, great and small, secret or known. Every day I repent seventy times. Wash

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me of my sins in snow and ice, wash my heart as one washes a garment, place between me and my faults the distance between the East and the West."

He records in the Koran the faults with which God reproached him. Once he turned his back on a poor blind man (lxxx, 1-11) and there were divine reproofs when he indulged in too strong imprecations against his enemies or when he was weak with his wives, etc. . . .

The theories of epilepsy, auto-suggestion or an excited imagination elaborated by psychiatrists do not take into account the camp-life of the desert and the ingenuity required to retain a place as a simple chief of a band of Bedouins.<sup>1</sup> Until he felt the call, his life had been normal and perfectly balanced and, his revelations apart, it never ceased to be. As in the case of the authentic mystics and the prophets of Israel it is not because he was ill that he had visions ; it is because he had visions that his body presented pathological symptoms.

"My heart was broken within me, all my bones trembled ; I am like a drunken man because of the Lord and his holy words," cried Jeremiah ; and Amos, wrapped in his mantle, like Mahomet, speaks in the same tone.

Neurotics, false mystics and authentic visionaries present certain phenomena in common. The one is purely passive ; the other active and creative. At the most we might say that a morbid tendency may facilitate trances which, in their turn, would increase

<sup>1</sup> L. Massignon, *Essai sur le lexique technique de la mystique musulmane*, 122, says that in order to see in Mahomet a very adroit legislator artificially dosing his prescriptions and the Koranic revelations, "it is necessary to overlook this fundamental point : that Mahomet did not manufacture the Koran."

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the tendency. But one finds no traces, as it seems, of this pathological state in Mahomet. Until he was a middle-aged man his health was perfect and the attacks did not occur except for purposes of revelation. Aside from this and the illness which caused his death when he was about sixty, he suffered almost only from a few headaches induced by long marches in the sun, which were treated by cupping.

The revelations assuredly caused him much suffering and certain phenomena would then take place which he did not care to show in public. Abu Bakr one day commented in a melancholy way on the Prophet's beard which had begun to turn white.

"It is the *Hâd*, the Inevitable, the Striking, and their sisters, the terrifying suras (xi, xxi, lvi, lxix, lxxvii, lxxviii, lxxxii and ci) that have put me into such a state," his friend replied.

After the revelations, there remained a heavy feeling in the head, which he treated with poultices. When he felt himself about to go into a trance, he had himself covered with a veil and could be heard groaning and breathing heavily. Even in winter when he came out of a trance he was drenched in perspiration.

Ya'la ben Omayya had asked 'Omar to let him see the Prophet in the throes of a revelation. One day on the road to Mecca the occasion presented itself. Someone had asked a question on the ritual of the pilgrimage. Mahomet was silent for an instant and then a revelation came to him. 'Omar had Ya'la approached and lifted the veil. Ya'la saw the Prophet's face very red ; he was breathing noisily and "groaning like a calf" ; then he fell into a state of torpor from which he aroused himself to ask :

"Where is the man who questioned me?" Immediately after the trance the Prophet recited

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the revealed verses ; someone would either learn them by heart or write them down under his dictation. Zaid ben Thâbit seems to have been his favourite secretary. When verse 97, iv, was revealed, relating to those who refused to take part in the holy war, Mahomet called to Zaid to write it on the scapula of a sheep. Just then Ibn Maktum presented himself, saying :

“I should indeed like to go to war but I am blind.”

At that moment the Prophet’s thigh was resting on that of Zaid, who felt its weight increase to such an extent that he began to fear his own was going to be crushed. Then Mahomet recited the sequel which exempted the infirm and those forced by necessity to remain behind.

The revelations came in several different manners, more or less clearly. At certain moments the Prophet heard a noise like the buzzing of a confused conversation or the tinkling of a bell or the rustling of wings. He did not grasp the sense of the words until the noise had ceased. This was the most fatiguing method of revelation and brought with it the most striking external phenomena. At other times, the angel appeared in human form (that of Dihya ben Khalifa, they say, one of the handsomest men of his day) or else in his own form. This vision would speak distinctly and Mahomet understood. This method, though superior to the preceding one, ranks below that of the vision which sometimes came directly to the Prophet. One recognizes here the classification of the Catholic theologists ; the graduation is the same from the physical vision to the imaginative vision and to the intellectual vision. To be sure there is a difference between the revelations of prophets, objective messages, law texts and definite orders and

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the revelations of mystics, subjective proofs of an inner transformation.

The Koran ordered the Prophet not to become nervous during the revelations, not "to roll his tongue about", not to weary himself in efforts to retain the text which God himself engraved on his memory with a facility almost frightening.

Far from being the creator of the composition of the Koran, Mahomet sometimes awaited in vain for revelations which placed him one day as we have seen, in an embarrassing situation. He would have preferred that the angel come a little oftener.

What is certain is the disorder and the incoherence of the text now used. The sacred books, in an essentially oral style, were not generally written until some time after their inception when the memory had dimmed and variations had begun to set in. Such is the case of the Koran. Seventy years after the Prophet an official version, *ne varietur*, was decided upon and all the other versions were destroyed.

At the death of the Prophet four *Ansar* knew the Koran by heart : Mo'adh ben Jabal, Zaid ben Thâbit, Obayy ben Ka'b and 'Abdallah ben Mas'ud. Upon the advice of 'Omar, the Caliph Abu Bakr, in spite of his own dislike and the scruples of Zaid ben Thâbit, ordered the latter to make a connected work, gathering together all the fragments written on pieces of pottery, palms, leaves, bones or in the memories of men. Later Caliph 'Othman ordered Zaid and three Qoraishites to establish a text after the copies in the possession of Hafsa, one of Mahomet's widows, and burned all the others. 'Abdallah ben Mas'ud, of whom the Prophet had said : "Whoever wishes to recite the Koran correctly and with grace, would do well to follow the reading by Ibn Mas'ud,"

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protested against the edition to which he had not been invited to contribute. 'Othman had him beaten to death. As to the definitive text, it is due to the efforts of Hajjaj, a lieutenant of Caliph 'Adb el Melik, who proceeded in the same fashion as had 'Othman.

It was not possible to classify the verses with any sort of system. The longer suras were put at the beginning, usually those revealed at Medina, and the shorter suras at the end, usually those of Mecca and the period when he began to preach. There are innumerable repetitions and some verses are obviously out of place. How can we know whether there have been additions, suppressions, interpretations, and to what extent? How can we know whether the *hadiths*, or the simple words of Mahomet as a man and not as an inspired Prophet have been slipped into the Koran proper? According to Ja'far, the Koran contained the names of seven Qoraishites and out of these seven only that of Abu Lahab remains; the Shi'ites accuse the Sunnites of having eliminated the passages favourable to 'Ali. One of Mahomet's secretaries, 'Abdallah ben Sa'd ben Abi Sarh, used to amuse himself by modifying what the Prophet had dictated; exposed, he fled to Mecca where he abjured Islam, but later he returned.

We do not claim to resolve the problem of the Koran but, generally speaking, it is chiefly in the *hadiths* rather than in the Holy Book that bold falsification has taken place.

Mahomet is not a theologian who speculates on the divine essence. He is drunk with the spirit of God. God is for him the absolute and necessary Reality. The Arabs did not deny the existence of God, the supreme creator, but they placed him in a far-away heaven; they feared him a little, did not

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think of loving him and in practice rendered him less homage than the idols and *jinns* from whom they expected much more definite help. God was far away but the idol was near at hand ; its priests and the oracles spoke in its name. From a vague abstraction Mahomet made a terrible and present reality of God and put the *jinns* and the angels in a secondary place. God had been far away, but henceforth he would be "closer to each man than his own carotid artery". The proof of his existence lies in the necessity of a Being who remains for ever fixed in the midst of the universal flux of things, as a permanent witness of the passing of things. "There is no power and help but in Him. We come from God and we return to God." He is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden, the One, the Living, the Highest in Himself and by Himself, the Powerful, the Creator, the Grand, the Magnificent, the Conqueror, the Glorious, the Worthy of Praise, the Majestic, the Strong, the Firm, the Wise, the Holy King, the Best of Judges, the Benefactor, the Real. He who exists always, who understands all and is sufficient unto Himself, the Eternal, the Inheritor of all when all save Him shall be dead, the Governor, the Witness, the Faithful, the Guide, the Guardian, the Protector, the Donator, the Provider, He who answers prayers, who watches, who foresees, who opens and who closes, and who forgives much, for He is the Compassionate and the Merciful without bounds.

Man is naked without defence, without excuse, before God ; but it pleases God to forgive. On his throne is inscribed : "My mercy outweighs my anger." He will forgive all those who forgive. God has more pleasure in a sinner who repents than has a nomad who, after having exhausted himself running

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in the desert searching for a straying camel, finds him at his feet in the morning. Man lives only to worship God who, however, has no need of him. We must desire Allah's Face and we must act, inspired by love of this Face. Everything is on the road to destruction except Allah's Face. This "theocentric" being of Mahomet's would have delighted the soul of Bérulle, Condren and the abbé Bremond ; the word "Islam" itself expresses this ideal of religious adhesion.

When we are filled with the divine spirit the soul is at peace and this feeling springs from faith. This happy state is attained by prayer, by fasting and by giving what we value most.

Although the Koran does not repeat after St. John the great Christian revelation that "God is love", Mahomet knew very well that Allah loves his creatures better than a mother loves her children, and he declared :

"God will reward goodness a hundredfold. He has reserved for himself ninety-nine hundredths of all goodness and, by virtue of the hundredth part left on earth, all his creatures are animated with a feeling of love, and the horse lifts up its hoof for fear of hurting the child."

The Koran tells us to return good for evil and we shall see our enemy change into a protector and friend.

Faith without love and without the works of love is a dead faith. One must flee anger, hatred, envy, slander and pride. "He who takes the first step towards a reconciliation is the better of the two. The true Mussulman is the Mussulman whose hand and whose tongue is not feared. The true *Mohajri* is he who flees what God has forbidden "

For this holy emigration Mahomet demanded, as

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had Jesus before him, that the disciple leave his father and his mother to follow him.

“ Each Mussulman is a stone of the same edifice,” “ Love ye one another for you are all part of the soul of God. ”

And God transcendent (whom the learned doctors have separated from the world by an impassable abyss) is accessible through love, the Highest is the king of the infirm, the Inviolate is close to the humblest, the Creator is a friend. “ O my God, ” says the Prophet, “ Thou art the refuge of my weakness and of my incompleteness, O Thou, the most merciful of the merciful, the king of the feeble, thou art my Lord. To whom else can I appeal ? If thou art not against me, the rest does not matter. ”

He knew that the true religion is based upon things of the spirit. “ An act must be judged by the intention . . . The fasting of him who does not renounce lying and deceit is not acceptable to God. ”

The Koran says :

*It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces in prayer towards the east and the west, but righteousness is of him who believeth in God and the last day, and the angels and the scriptures and the prophets ; who giveth money for God's sake unto his kindred and unto orphans, and the needy, and the stranger, and those who ask, and for redemption of captives ; who is constant at prayer and giveth alms ; and of those who perform their covenant . . . and who behave themselves patiently in adversity. (ii, 172.)*

And it continues to tell us that the flesh and blood of victims do not reach God, but that piety mounts to the heavens . . .

“ Help your brother, ” Mahomet said one day, “ whether he be the oppressor or the oppressed. ”

“ O Messenger of God, ” said some one to him, “ I would gladly assist my brother were he oppressed, but how can I aid the oppressor ? ”

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“ In preventing him from doing evil.”

Upon returning from an expedition he said :

“ We are now returning from the little holy war ; now we must enter upon the great holy war, the war against ourselves.”

Man’s love should extend to all creatures ; for when even the humblest bird unfolds its wings, it praises the Lord.

Indisputably, Mahomet’s preachings brought about a great progress in Arabian life as regards both the family and hygiene. Woman’s status, as we shall see, was greatly improved. Prostitution, temporary marriage and free love were forbidden as well as the forcing of captives into prostitution to enrich their masters. He tolerated slavery but he also regulated it. To free a slave he cited as a good action ; for certain infractions of the ritual the freeing of a slave was the penance.

“ Whoever frees a slave shall be exempted from hell ; for every member of the liberated slave, a member of the liberator shall be freed, even to the secret parts of his body . . . Your slaves are your brothers. Give them the same food and the same clothing that you wear. Do not force them to work beyond their strength.”

Abu Dharr having called Bilal “ the son of a negress ”, Mahomet said :

“ You still retain some pre-Islamic sentiments.”

They must not say his “ slave ” but his “ servant ” ; nor my “ master ” for there is no master but God. En Nadhr’s daughter having broken the tooth of a slave in violently slapping her, Mahomet saw to it that she was repaid in the same coin.

“ Shall we be rewarded for kindness to animals ? ” someone asked the Prophet.

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“ There will be a reward for whoever quenches the thirst of any creature endowed with a living heart. He who has caused a well to be dug will be rewarded for every camel which comes to drink of the water.”

When we see how the asses are abused in North Africa we realize to what an extent many of the *hadiths* recommending kindness have been forgotten. Mahomet cursed anyone who mutilated an animal and forbade the killing of animals in cold blood when not necessary. Ibn ‘Omar, remembering the Prophet’s words, rescued a hen from some ragamuffins who wanted to use her as a target. The animals will be present at the Last Judgment to testify against cruel masters. A woman who had let a cat die of hunger shall suffer for ever in hell as the cat claws at her. But, on the other hand, a prostitute shall enter the kingdom of heaven because one day having seen a dog dying of thirst beside a well she attached her shoe to her veil and drew water for it to drink.

Theologists, moralists, jurists and mystics will find in the Mahometan teachings the premises of their arguments, each one then going in his particular direction, but preserving a strictly theocentric basis. The several schools all cite the *hadiths*, true and false, with which to maintain their contradictions. The great metaphysical problems, which scarcely interested Mahomet, spring from these *hadiths*. In the discussion about free will, for example, both the fatalist Jabarites and their opponents the Qadarites seek to prove their points by the Koran and the Sunna. The question is couched in the same terms and receives the same solution as given by the scholastics, Thomas Aquinas, Bossuet, the Jansenists and the Molinists. The Koran, which insists upon the all-powerfulness and prescience of God, says that “ all comes from God ”

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but that evil comes from the perverted human will. We may find texts both for and against free will ; these are the two ends of the chain of which the human spirit has never seized the intermediary links. If the Mussulmans, especially during the decadent periods, seem to lean towards "Oriental fatalism", there is nothing in the Koran to compel this, contrary to what Leibnitz and current opinion believe. When a Bedouin asked Mahomet whether it was necessary to tie up his camel, the Prophet replied :

" Tie up your camel and trust yourself to God." But when someone said it was useless to act when all was already known in advance by God, he replied :

" Act ; the task will be made easy for you." Which is the same as saying : " Heaven helps them who help themselves."

" At the same time act, as regards this world, as if you were going to live for ever ; and as regards the other world as if you were going to die to-morrow," the Prophet is supposed to have said. This, truly, is the wisdom and the solution of all ethics.

" The most intelligent Mussulmans," he added, " are those who think oftenest of death and prepare themselves as best they can for the life that is to follow." Sometimes Christian asceticism and Moslem morality are held up for comparison, rather unnecessarily, it would appear. Islam seems to be more indulgent to the flesh ; it does not demand the mortification of the flesh and it teaches that prayer will rise the higher from a body that has had all legitimate pleasures. But actually the austerities of the Moslem mystics are equal to those of the ascetics of any other religion. Also, Islam forbids the drinking of wine, ordains a fast far more rigorous than that of any other religion, and the Moslem women have imposed on them a

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severity of behaviour and dress not equalled by any other European standards for women to-day. With the constant clashes between practice and theory and the inconsistency of theories on different points, it is a little pretentious to make clearly drawn parallels. It is likewise often very difficult to determine what results from principles and what relates to the customs of the country and of the time.

In the ultra-civilized Roman Empire, voluptuous and decadent, the first Christians were opposed, naturally, to the general sensuality. In pagan Arabia, where the customs were free but rude, the first Mussulmans stigmatized the heathen practices ; but the Bedouins, famished half the year, semi-naked, without any adequate shelter, almost always at war, were naturally deprived of any excesses of pleasure, although when an occasion presented itself they relished it like grown-up, impetuous children. Later, with the coming of great riches, there appeared the necessity for an ascetic reaction and the *Sufi* movement sprang into being, the social life having ceased to be that of the warrior and shepherd.

All religious movements are of necessity at their beginning ascetic. The Koran never ceases to repeat that the life of this world is nothing compared to that of the other, and only a temporary state, a vain game if it does not fulfil its essential aim. Selman, like Pascal, compared the believer to a sick person whom the physician forbade to eat that which would do him harm.

“Act, in this world,” said Ibn ‘Omar, “like a stranger and passer-by.”

“If you knew what I know,” said the Prophet, “you would laugh little and cry a great deal.”

Sometimes at night Mahomet would wake with a start, shaken by the thought of the end. Then

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he would gather his wives together and preach to them.

The disciples would have attacks of repentance and mystic enthusiasm. Abu Talha, who owned more palm-groves in Medina than anyone else (the Prophet often went to drink of the fresh water flowing in his favourite grove), one day hearing the verse of the Koran which says the real piety consists in giving others what one most values, offered his lands. Mahomet congratulated him, but recommended that he give them to his kindred. At another time an *Ansari* dashed into a mosque, threw himself upon his knees, and cried aloud his sin :

“ The last of the last has committed fornication ! ”

Mahomet turned his back and did not answer. The man followed him, repeating his confession four times. And it is said that the man was stoned for this.

Several of the faithful increased their penances, their prayers and their fasting. Mahomet had to modify their zeal and forbid that they fast oftener than every other day. He disapproved of excessive mortification. When some of them had had themselves led in the pilgrimage with camels' tethers drawn through their noses, Mahomet cut the cords saying :

“ God does not require that man mutilate himself.”

Far from considering worldly possessions an indication of divine favour, Mahomet was troubled by them, for he did not wish to receive all his reward in this world ; and we ought not be deceived by the prosperity of the wicked.

“ What I fear most for you,” he often said to his adherents, “ are the things that are given you in this world.”

“ Can good result in evil ? ” he was asked.

Mahomet was at that moment in the pulpit. He

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ceased preaching, and those in the congregation said to one another : " He is having a revelation."

After a long silence Mahomet wiped the perspiration from his brow, called forward the one who had questioned him, and then said three times :

" Are the splendours of this world really worthy of the name of good ? "

Then he went on to say that riches were only desirable if they had been come by honestly and if they were employed in a godly manner in helping the poor. If not, riches were a curse, and in any case, a great temptation. " The richest in this world will be the poorest in the next, unless they distribute thus : (and the Prophet made a gesture, first in front of him, then to the right and left, as if he were distributing gifts profusely). Alas ! how few do it !

God's curse was upon those who refused to give alms, for charity is the only possible purification of wealth. " I," said the doorkeeper of hell, " I see pass by my gate mostly the proud, the carnal, the rich."

" And how is it," said the gate-keeper of paradise, " that only the poor, the feeble and the humble enter here ? "

The worshipper of the dinar will perish. On the Day of Judgment, the treasures melted down by a white heat and then cast into the form of a python with a bald head and horns, will burn the miser and will pursue those who have made bad use of their wealth, crying : " I am your wealth, I am your treasure ! "

Mahomet was indignant at the cupidity of his people ; he thundered against hoarding, usury, the extortions of the merchants, the partiality of the law towards the rich. Much of this was softened in subsequent interpretations, but at first the Islamites asked themselves whether all luxury ought not to be

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rigorously proscribed and many thought it wrong to have more than what was absolutely required for bare necessities. Undoubtedly, this was too unconditional, too absolute a doctrine, to have permitted Islam to conquer the world and to found the empire of the Caliphs, but it was well in keeping with the primitive spirit.

The sermons of the prophet must have been very impressive. He repeated his expressions in a way that often spread terror amongst his auditors. He spoke so eloquently one day of the torments of the tomb that his listeners "let out a great howl". His emotions were so tense, that when he was asked idle questions he grew angry very easily. As we have seen, he found new and touching images with which to describe the infinite mercy of Allah and the joys of the chosen, but he also spoke unceasingly of the apocalyptic terrors awaiting the doomed.

Men will become drunk without wine ; children will have white hair. Whosoever can find a refuge, let him hide. Thirty antichrists will appear. The girl-slave will give birth to her master ; humble herdsmen of camels will sprawl about in palaces ; people will be set to work building houses of extraordinary height. At doomsday men will stand before God unclothed, uncircumcized as at the day of their birth. ("Then," said the arch 'A'isha, "men and women will see each other quite naked ?" "The circumstances will be too serious for them to pay attention to such matters," was the reply.) Under a burning sun and filled with shame, they will be immersed up to the neck in their own sweat. God alone knows the date of that Hour, which will come upon us suddenly. We must therefore always be ready for it. The Hour will come upon us so quickly that two

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men having unfolded some goods shall not have the time in which to conclude their bargain or to fold up the goods again. That Hour will be full upon us before a man who is carrying a morsel of food to his mouth shall have had time to eat it. The Prophet is like a man who has been despoiled by an enemy army and who says : " I have seen the army with my own eyes and I come to warn you. Save yourselves ! "

But they did not all listen.

One night Mahomet awoke with a start in Zainab's bed, all red and out of breath ; he said :

" Woe unto the 'Arabs ! A fissure as big as that (and he made a little circle with his thumb and forefinger) has just rent the wall of Gog and Magog."

These eschatological terrors obsessed the Mussulmans who asked themselves whether antichrist had not already been born. A young Jew of Medina, Ibn Sayyad, famous for his ability to foretell the future and for his hostility to Islam, publicly ridiculed the Prophet. One day, while walking with 'Omar and others of his companions, the Prophet met Ibn Sayyad who was playing with some other lads near the fortress of the Banu Moghâla. Mahomet touched him on the shoulder and said :

" Bear witness with me that Allah alone is God and that I am his Messenger."

The ragamuffin looked him in the eyes and replied :

" I testify that you are the Messenger of the barbarians. And you, will you bear witness that I am the Messenger of Allah ? "

" I believe in God and in his prophet," said Mahomet, shaking the impertinent boy, " And you—what visions do you have ? "

" Sometimes true visions and sometimes false ones."

## RASUL ALLAH

“ It is because your *jinn* confuses things for you. Very well, at this instant I am thinking of something. Tell me what it is.”

“ You are thinking of the smo . . . ” (it is thought that the word was smoke).

“ Do not go too far.”

“ Messenger of God, let me kill him,” interrupted ‘Omar.

“ No, if he is what I think he is (antichrist) no one would have any power over him, for it is Jesus who must vanquish him ; if he is not, there is no advantage to be gained in killing him.”

Another day, in a palm-grove, Ibn Sayyad, lying in his cloak, was prophesying. Mahomet and Obayy ben Ka‘b, passing near by, wished to hear his words.

“ Heu ! There’s Mahomet ! ” called his mother to the lad. He fled at once.

“ Had that woman let him be we would have known exactly what he is,” said Mahomet.

Although the Prophet’s preachings were tinged with ideas about the end of the world, he aimed none the less at reorganizing Moslem society, and the Koran is at the same time a Book of Warning, a Psalm to God’s glory and a collection of statutes.

Thus in the first years following the Hegira were established the five pillars of the Moslem religion : prayer, fasting, the tithe, pilgrimage and the attestation of the divine unity. The practices of the Prophet (*sunna*) established the manner. Thus, for the call to prayer, some wanted to use the clapper as did the Christians, some the trumpets as did the Jews and some bonfires as did the Mazdians. Upon the advice of ‘Omar, Mahomet had the negro Bilal cry the announcement with his powerful voice. It was thus that Bilal became the official muezzin of the

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Prophet, the first muezzin and the patron of all the muezzins who for thirteen centuries have called forth five times a day from all minarets that Allah is greatest.

It was also Bilal, long, thin, bent, with the face of a crow under a head of thick grey hair, his lance in his hand, who walked in front of his master to celebrate at the gates of the city the Greater and the Lesser Feasts, that of the sheep recalling the Passover and the sacrifice of Abraham, and that of the end of the fast day (thereafter set for the month of Ramadan).

But all the ritualistic ordinances, either compulsory or elective, which are not explained entirely by the hygienic theory advanced by the modernists, nor the taboos dear to the hearts of ethnologists, were destined first of all for the exterior discipline of the cult and for the general good and the cohesion of the community, and finally (and essentially) as a rule of conduct to prepare the believers for the inner purification, inculcating them all with a religious spirit and preparing some of them for a mystic life. And the "sacrament", one might say the essential of Islam, was the reciting of the verses of the Koran, the shining pearls of the necklace of everlasting wisdom.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ZAINAB

*Praise God who transforms our hearts!*

IN the later part of his life Mahomet's liking for women increased. He had been faithful to Khadija, a woman much older than himself, for twenty years. And now this temperate husband tasted new and voluptuous joys with the young 'Aïsha, a wife at nine years of age—not exceptional in a country where often exist grandmothers of twenty-five. As statesman and soldier, Mahomet organized his house at Medina in the same manner as the Arab *sayyids* ; like those chiefs he made many marriages both for convenience and for love, though not refusing to accept at the same time a few beautiful slaves as concubines offered as gifts or captives of war. As his dormant sensuality increased, he multiplied one by one the doors leading on to the inner court of the mosque and each communicating with the apartments of his wives.

He had married Sawda, Sokran's widow, after Khadija's death and before 'Aïsha was old enough for the marriage-bed. By espousing another widow, Hafsa, the daughter of 'Omar, he not only established an excellent relationship between himself and the latter, but won a great beauty of eighteen who played an important rôle in his harem. Omm Selma, the widow of one of the Abyssinian emigrants, had refused both Abu Bakr and 'Omar, and even raised objections to marrying Mahomet himself.

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“Can such happiness be that the Prophet thinks of me ?” she said. “I am already thirty and have a son ; moreover, I have a very jealous disposition . . .” Nevertheless, the Prophet married her after his defeat at Ohod.

“At least you are a little younger than I,” he said, “and I will be a father to your son Selma ; as for your jealous disposition, I will pray Allah to uproot it from your heart.” And, like the others, he gave her a marriage portion of four hundred dirhems and for her house a sack of barley, a hand-mill, a cooking-pot, a jar of butter and a mattress of palm-fibres.

Mahomet was still very attached to Zaid ben Haritha, whom he called his “Well-Beloved”. He was continually consulting this faithful freedman and adopted son, and looked upon him as his possible heir ; many Oriental Viziers cherish their former young slaves, making them their consultants and successors. The same year after the surrender of the Banu Nadhir, Mahomet went to visit Zaid. That day Zaid was absent, and Mahomet found himself in the presence of Zainab bint Jahsh, the most beautiful girl of her tribe. She was without her veil and partly naked, busying herself with her toilet and her household duties. In all the freshness of her youth and lovely in her disarray, Zaid’s wife made a great impression on Mahomet. She blushed with confusion. As he went out, he said :

“Praised be God who transforms our hearts and does with them as he pleases !”

Zainab was aware of the effect she had produced and told her story to her husband who was greatly surprised. While very devoted to his benefactor, he knew also Mahomet’s susceptible temperament ; the situation was most perplexing. He knew that

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under these conditions he could no longer keep his wife. His motives may have been those of the noblest sacrifice, the most delicate token of esteem ; on the other hand they may have arisen from vulgar ambition or a cowardly desire to please. Most probably, the unfortunate, embarrassed man must have said to himself that there was no other possible outcome and that it was better to construe bad fortune into virtuous necessity. He divulged his intention to repudiate Zainab to the Prophet.

“ Why ? ” said Mahomet. “ What fault have you to find with her ? ”

“ None, but I can no longer live with her.”

“ Come ! Keep your wife and fear God.”

But Zaid thought that from delicacy, affection and fear of scandal, the Prophet was not expressing what he really thought. He persisted in his resolution, found a subtle pretext for disclaiming his wife and repudiated her several days later. (Who knows what may have gone on in this woman’s mind ? ) When the legal period of separation after the divorce had expired, the beautiful Zainab sent some one to inform Mahomet. “ It is because of you that Zaid repudiated me,” was the message. Although the Prophet wanted to marry her he was ashamed and, moreover, the law forbade marriage with the wife of an adopted son of the same name as that of a real son. But God, surrounded by his angels, understood the perplexity of his Elected, and revealed to him that he might take Zainab to wife.

“ Who will carry this news to Zainab ? ” cried Mahomet in the height of his joy. ‘Aïsha became furious, but her husband said to her ;

“ Do you wish to oppose God’s command ? ”

A woman ran to inform the divorcee, and soon after

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mishap no doubt induced a state of trance, for the Prophet immediately had the revelation of the verse of "the Curtain" :

*O true believers, enter not the houses of the prophet, unless it be permitted you to eat meat with him, without waiting his convenient time ; but when ye are invited, then enter. And when ye shall have eaten, disperse yourselves ; and stay not to enter into family discourse : for this incommodeth the prophet. He is ashamed to bid you depart ; but God is not ashamed of the truth. And when ye ask of the prophet's wives what ye may have occasion for, ask it of them from behind a curtain. This will be more pure for your hearts and their hearts. Neither is it fit for you to give any uneasiness to the apostle of God, or to marry his wives after him for ever.—(xxxiii, 53).*

The wives of the Prophet became the "Mothers of the Believers" ; they were not allowed to marry after his death. The Koran prescribed that they should remain in their houses, choose their words carefully, avoid luxury ; that they should pray, dispense alms, and obey their husband in learning by heart the holy verses. The harem thus came to be a sort of voluptuous and devout convent.

## CHAPTER XX

### 'AISHA AND HER NECKLACE

*We belong to God and we return to God.*

IN the sixth year of the Hegira (628) after the encounter with the Banu Qoraïdha and the marriage of Zainab, Mahomet sent a detachment against the Banu Bakr who were assembled on the road to Syria. The Mussulmans returned with booty and the enemy Sheikh as a prisoner. This Bedouin became a convert through their honourable treatment of him and served them by pillaging with such success from the Qoraishite caravans that Mecca, practically reduced to famine, was obliged to confide in Mahomet himself. The Prophet, very generously, begged the nomads not to starve his former countrymen. With the greatest political and tactical ability, he reaped the benefit from a series of campaigns directed as much against the Qoraishite commerce as against hostile tribes.

After having chastised the Ghatafan who had stolen some camels, Mahomet was warned by his spies that the Banu Mostaliq had assembled their warriors ; he made a surprise attack on them, and cut them to pieces after a relentless battle of sabres and showers of arrows. Numerous prisoners, one thousand camels and five thousand sheep fell into the victors' possession. The women were also violated the night of the battle—fruits of the flesh at the point

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spot was deserted. 'Aïsha called aloud, but no one replied. The men, seeing the litter closed and thinking it occupied, had placed it on the camel and departed with it. As 'Aïsha was only fifteen years old and very slight, especially after the privations of a severe campaign, no one was surprised at the light weight of the palaquin.

The deserted 'Aïsha decided to sit down, hoping that they would return to fetch her. She soon fell asleep. . . .

"We belong to God and we return to God!"

'Aïsha awakened with a start. . . . A young man stood before her holding a camel by its tether. Safwan ben el Mu'thal, following the army in the rear-guard, had noticed this young woman asleep in the desert and, upon approaching her, recognized her as the Prophet's wife.

"We belong to God and we return to God," he repeated with emotion, but saying nothing more.

'Aïsha quickly covered herself with her veil. Safwan adjusted his camel's saddle-girth and making it kneel, helped the young woman to mount. Holding the beast by the bridle, they resumed the road. After a long and tiring walk, they caught up at noon with the army; when it was discovered that the litter was empty there was general surprise, and it was almost too much for them to see the "mother of the believers" in the company of a young man.

This was a fine opportunity for the tattle of the gossips and the evilly disposed. Both Mahomet's and 'Aïsha's enemies made the most of this incident.

"Safwan is young and handsome," jeered 'Abdallah ben Obayy. "It is not surprising that 'Aïsha prefers him to Mahomet."

Hassân ben Thâbit, the poet, and Mistah, Abu

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Bakr's cousin, were foremost amongst the scoffers, and the first went so far as to write satiric verses against Safwan. Hamna thought to render her sister Zainab a service by speaking against this wife accused of adultery ; for Zainab was really 'Aisha's rival. So recently married, she was the only one of the Prophet's wives who was on an equal footing with the favourite. Hamna insinuated that 'Aisha and Safwan had already met several times and that the loss of the necklace was merely a pretext for a convenient tête-à-tête. Either through diplomacy or anxiety, 'Aisha fell ill after having been warned by Mistah's mother. Mahomet went to see her, but did not show his usual solicitude ; on the contrary, he asked her brusquely how she was. She begged him to allow her to go home to her parents.

"Be consoled," said her mother. "All young, pretty and well-loved women are the butt of evil tongues."

"What ! Is everyone talking about it ? . . . Does my father know ? "

And she burst into sobs. Abu Bakr, who was reciting from the Koran on the first floor, came down and asked his daughter to come up to his quarters.

Divided between his love and his uncertainty, the Prophet did not know what course to adopt. His memory recalled the graceful little daughter of Abu Bakr, the only one of his wives who was a virgin, whose impudent sweetness had charmed him in his maturity and whose gaiety had chased away so many cares. Before their marriage he had even thought of her in his dreams, and one night he saw an angel bringing him her slender little body wrapped in a piece of silk. He remembered how in the past he allowed his young wife to play with dolls and how he

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even played with her, and he reflected upon her charm, her childish and loving jealousy, and also upon her thoughtlessness ! He recalled how, one day, when seeing a man with her, his countenance had fallen.

“ It is my foster-brother ”, she hastily said, recalling that Mahomet had authorized Hafsa to receive her foster-relatives, since giving suck was supposed to produce the same rights and the same prohibitions as giving birth.

“ Be careful,” he had once specified, “ that they are really your foster-brothers ; the fact that they have suckled the same woman two or three times is not enough to make them so.”

This agonizing condition of affairs having lasted for a month, no more divine revelations came to the Prophet. He consulted ‘Ali and Osama, the son of Zaid.

“ This sort of sorrow comes to many husbands, and, anyhow, there are many other women you can marry,” said ‘Ali. (The favourite never forgave him for this.)

But Osama had nothing to say except in favour of the accused. Following his son-in-law’s advice, Mahomet questioned his wife’s servant, Boraïra.

“ I see no reason for reproaching her since she is very young and a little heedless ; sometimes she falls asleep while she is making the bread. I have not noticed anything happening. But,” the negress added naïvely, “ I hear that in her childhood she stole and ate a little piece of pie that belonged to a neighbour.”

Even Zainab spoke only favourably of her rival. The Prophet complained of his detractors from the pulpit, citing particularly ‘Abdallah ben Obayy; this had provoked a violent quarrel between the Aws and

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the Khazraj. The powerful Khazraj chief, Sa‘d ben ‘Obāda, defended ‘Abdallah and spoke against ‘Aīsha ; Mahomet intervened, pacified them and reduced them to silence. And he still remained silent. . . .

‘Aīsha wept continually. Safwan swore that in his whole life he had never turned up the skirt of a single woman. Abu Bakr and his wife came the following day to visit their daughter and sat beside her in tears. One of the women of Medina also came in and wept. Mahomet entered and, for the first time since this incident, sat down, saying gently to his wife :

“ If you are innocent, O ‘Aīsha, God will absolve you. But if you failed in your duties, turn to God and ask his pardon. For whosoever confesses his fault and turns to God will be pardoned by God, who will turn to him. I beg of you, tell me the truth.”

“ Are you not ashamed to speak of this before that woman ? ” cried ‘Aīsha boldly, pointing to the woman of Medina and holding back her tears. Her father intervening, she asked him to reply for her.

“ I do not know what to say,” said poor Abu Bakr. And as her mother also excused herself, the young girl engaged on her own defensive very energetically :

“ I know what they have said about me and I see that you believe it. If I tell you that I am innocent—and God knows that I am—you will not believe me. I am in the position of Jacob when he said : ‘ *Patience is most becoming, and God’s assistance is to be implored* ’ ” (Koran, xii, 18).

Then she returned to her bed with the hope that God would clear her of this accusation. She could not believe (as she related subsequently) that a revelation would come to assist her, believing her adventure too humble for God to notice in his verses destined to be recited thereafter. (To-day this passage

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of the Koran is chanted in the prayers like the others.) All that she could hope for was that the Messenger of God would have a vision in his sleep which will exonerate her.

The Prophet did not change his place and no one had time to leave before the revelation came to him. Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his face. When they uncovered him (they always covered him with a veil during the revelations) he was smiling and his first words were :

“ O ‘Aïsha, praise God, for he has exonerated you.” The verses of the sura “ Light ” had been revealed to him, proclaiming ‘Aïsha’s innocence and reprimanding her detractors.

“ Rise and thank the Messenger of God,” said her mother.

“ No,” said the young woman, “ I shall rise to thank God alone.”

According to the passage in the Koran, those accusing a woman without four witnesses shall be punished with eighty strokes of the whip. Certain people who had not been too complimentary in their remarks were chastised ; the influential Ibn Obayy escaped, however. Abu Bakr resolved to withdraw an allowance he paid to Mistah, but a verse was added forbidding the well-off to make such resolutions. Hassân ben Thâbit received a good beating from Safwan, who nearly killed him, but Mahomet, made peace between the two men and favoured the poet. Nor did ‘Aïsha wish for his death ; she pitied the blind poet and was grateful to him for having defended the Prophet’s cause in his proverbs and satires. But one day when Hassân was singing love-poems in her apartments, she gave way just a little to a spirit of revenge.

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"Chaste and proud," he sang, "her light will never be put out by the least suspicion. In the morning she will rise without slandering her neighbour. . . ."

"Unlike you," said 'Aisha laughing.

Later, when 'Aisha retailed this tragic episode of the necklace, she added :

"They made inquiries about Ibn El Mu'thal (Safwan) and discovered him to be impotent. . . ."

From that time on, 'Aisha seldom went on these expeditions. But once when she accompanied Mahomet and lost another necklace she ordered one of the soldiers to hunt it for her, delaying the army to such an extent that they had no water for their ritual ablutions. Abu Bakr scolded her severely and would have beaten her had he not been afraid of waking the Prophet, who was sleeping with his head in his favourite's lap. The necklace was discovered under a stretched-out camel. This incident was followed by a revelation authorizing the use of sand instead of water in emergencies.

Later, when 'Aisha did go on an expedition, Hafsa went also. As a joke the two women exchanged camels ; 'Aisha was so vexed at seeing Mahomet ride beside the litter containing her rival that she climbed down at a halting-place and put her naked foot into the grass hoping that it would be stung by a scorpion.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE HAREM

*Accept women as they are with  
all their curvatures . . .*

AFTER the defeat of the Banu Qoraïdha, Mahomet first married Rihâna and then later another Jewess, Safiya, one of the spoils of the battle of Khaïbar, whose husband, Kinâna, had been killed. Mahomet gave Safiya her liberty as a dowry and married her on the way back to Medina after the necessary period of mourning had elapsed. For the wedding-feast, Anas prepared a *haisa* of butter, cheese and dates, for they had no bread or meat. It would seem that Mahomet was not in love with this handsome Jewess for very long. People were asked not to remind her of her race and she was advised to say :

“ Aaron was my father, Moses my uncle, and Mahomet is my husband.”

One day when her state of health delayed the end of a pilgrimage, he did not hesitate to call her “a sterile, ill-omened woman”.

Ramla, known as Omm Habîba, was Abu Sofyan’s daughter and the widow of ‘Obaïdallah, the Christian hanif who had emigrated from Abyssinia. Mahomet married her by procuration in the States of the Negus who, they say, paid a dowry of four hundred gold dinars in consideration of Mahomet’s Prophetic calling. Being no longer young her status in the harem was not important, but her marriage, apart from

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giving an honourable position to the widow of a well-known man, was useful because it brought together the Prophet and her father.

“There is no bit strong enough to hold in the lascivious camel,” cried Abu Sofyan when he heard of his enemy’s marriage with his daughter.

After this Mahomet married Maïmuna, El ‘Abbas’s sister-in-law, which established an excellent relationship between the Prophet and her nephew, Khalid ben el Walid, the distinguished general. Mahomet wedded two other women, but these marriages were never consummated ; for the one showed symptoms of an illness resembling leprosy and the other, a high-born Bedouin of a defeated tribe, was overcome with sudden pride when he wanted to take her.

“Should a queen give herself to one of the people ? I come from a tribe which receives everything and gives nothing. I ask God to protect me against you.”

“You are invoking an all-powerful being,” said the Prophet, and returned her to her family after dressing her in fine linen.

He had two or three concubines as well, the most important being Maria, the Copt, a gift from the Moqawqis of Egypt. She bore him a son, Ibrahim, who did not live long ; the death of this male heir was a great sorrow to Mahomet, who, with his own hands, buried the little body in the tomb, weeping copiously. That very day an eclipse occurred and the people said it was a sign of mourning, although Mahomet was open-minded enough to refute this pretty superstition, saying :

“The heavenly bodies do not wear a veil for the death of any human creature”—words which an impostor would not have said.

Maria’s sister, Shirin, he gave to Hassân, the poet.

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With Maria, the Moqawqis had sent an eunuch, Mihran, as well, who remained to serve her. Mahomet, being suspicious about this slave, sent 'Ali with the order to kill him if his doubts were correct. Seeing 'Ali with sabre in hand, Mihran fled. But 'Ali caught him.

"What have I done?" And the eunuch, lifting his tunic, removed all suspicion.

Several women who offered themselves to the Prophet without a dowry aroused 'Aisha's jealousy.

"How dare a woman offer herself like that?" she said. But the Koran gave permission to the Prophet, and 'Aisha remarked, not without a certain amount of irony and bitterness :

"I do not deny that God makes haste to satisfy your desires."

'Aisha was a spoilt, flirtatious child ; she loved luxury and money (later, she went into the business of slave-trading) ; she was ambitious (her enterprises just fell short of overthrowing Islam) ; and she was authoritative and hard (she cut off the hand of a slave who stole a half-dinar). In spite of her grace, her charm and her wit, she led her husband a hard life. A collection of anecdotes were composed to show that the women of the Taim clan—her clan—possessed particularly disagreeable natures and dominated their husbands.

Jealousy even carried 'Aisha to the past ; she could not bear Mahomet's eulogies on the memory of the former faithful companion of his life.

"But wasn't Khadija an old woman?" said the young beauty. "Have you not something better now?"

"God never gave me a better wife!" cried the Prophet. "When I was poor she enriched me ; when

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all the world treated me as a liar and abandoned me, she believed in me and comforted me."

"There never seems to have been another woman in the world but Khadija!" said 'Aïsha, when Mahomet sent some joints of mutton to the dead woman's friends. And one day, Hala, Khadija's sister, happened to come to Medina.

"O my God! It is Hala," cried the Prophet, troubled at hearing in Hala's voice the same tone as his former wife's.

"Why are you always dragging in these old Qoraishites, those toothless victims of age?" grumbled Abu Bakr's daughter. Mahomet treated this unruly child paternally for he was very indulgent to the weaknesses of the female character when they were not carried too far.

"It is woman's nature to be jealous, and when jealousy dominates her she is unable to distinguish the true course of a stream. We must excuse her," said he to Abu Bakr one day when 'Aïsha was so insolent to her husband that her father slapped her.

He was dining with 'Aïsha once when another of his wives sent in some delicacies by a servant; she struck the servant's hand and the plate fell and broke. Mahomet picked up the pieces calmly, collected the delicacies and said to the guests:

"Your mother is jealous. . . ." And he had a new plate brought to replace the broken one. Once when he was ill he remarked to his young wife:

"Would you not rather die before me and know that I would bury you?"

"I should like that well enough if I did not think that upon returning from my funeral you would console yourself with another woman." He smiled.

His preference for Abu Bakr's daughter was well

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known. Some of his friends chose a day when he was with her to make her a present. Certain others of his wives sent Omm Selma to complain, but he turned his back without replying, allowing them to come back twice with the same objection, when he said :

“ Do not torment me about ‘Aïsha. If the revelation comes to me when I am in the skirts of a woman it is only in hers.” Omm Selma and her conspirators finally resorted to more serious means and sent Fâtimâ herself to ask him to show impartiality.

“ My dear child,” he replied, “ do you not love what I love ? ”

“ Yes, surely,” was all that the timorous Fâtimâ could say ; she refused to speak again to him on the subject. So they sent the beautiful Zainab, who said in a very loud voice :

“ Your wives ask you to show impartiality and not to favour the daughter of Abu Bakr.”

Her voice was so strident that ‘Aïsha, who was sitting a little apart, heard her. Mahomet turned to see how she took it. The favourite rose to the occasion so well that, after a spectacular speech, Zainab was reduced to silence.

“ Ah ! ” cried Mahomet, with a certain admiration “ she is certainly Abu Bakr’s daughter.”

In order to please and not be repudiated by him the elderly Sawda, and the Jewess, Safiya, gave up their days to the favourite, for a husband was supposed to divide his time equally between each of his wives. But occasionally, the Prophet grew really weary of the quarrels in his harem.

“ Hell is inhabited by women,” he said. “ Beware of their intrigues.”

“ Of course,” replied ‘Aïsha, confident of her

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power, “ woman is a stubborn steed. . . .” Abu Bakr often intervened and tried to reason with his daughter, always with a view, however, to the private interests and ambitions of his family.

Actually, the harem was divided into two factions : on the one hand, ‘Aisha and Hafsa, the daughters of Abu Bakr and ‘Omar, the Prophet’s aids ; this faction was assured of the sympathy of Sawda and Safiya, so little loved by their husband : on the other hand, Omm Selma, the beautiful Zainab and the other wives. The plebeians of Taïm and of ‘Adi were opposed to the old aristocracy of Mecca.

Did Abu Bakr and ‘Omar hope to succeed their son-in-law ? It is said that they were in agreement with Abu ‘Obaïda to divide the power successively after Mahomet’s death, which they succeeded in doing. They managed, through their daughters, to have a powerful influence counterbalancing that of ‘Ali and Fâtimâ.

The Makhzumite, Omm Selma, as we know, had warned the Prophet of her jealous nature ; he had replied by saying that he would pray God to uproot this tendency from her heart. It happened that her jealousy was put to a severe test and she was the cause of several dramatic scenes. One night when Mahomet went into ‘Aïsha’s room and was beginning to caress her, he did not notice Omm Selma’s presence, even though ‘Aïsha had tried to inform him by signs that she was there. The Makhzumite burst forth with :

“ I see that your other wives are nothing in your eyes.” And she started to abuse the favourite.

“ Well, answer her ! ” said Mahomet to ‘Aïsha after vainly trying to calm Omm Selma. Abu Bakr’s daughter was not at a loss. In the quarrels between

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the mothers of the faithful she always had the upper hand, the traditionalists gravely tell us, and she soon reduced the Makhzumite to silence. Finding, moreover, that the Prophet was too attentive to the 'Ali-Fâtimâ household, her treatment of them became insolent. Omm Selma was eager to let Mahomet's daughter and son-in-law know that 'Aîsha had spoken of them in an offensive manner. 'Ali sent his wife to protest.

"By the Master of the Ka'ba, yes ! 'Aîsha is your father's best-beloved," replied the Prophet.

And 'Ali, in the face of so much cynicism, went to the Prophet himself.

"Is it not enough for us to have been insulted by 'Aîsha ?" he said. "Is it necessary for you to tell Fâtima that she is your best-beloved ?"

So, to avoid further recriminations, the Prophet had the door leading from his apartments to those of his daughter sealed.

"When the Prophet is ill," said 'Omar, "his wives mop their eyes reddened with tears, but when he returns to health again, they seize him by the throat."

Mahomet, they say, loved honey very much. One day his wives discovered that he remained for a longer time than usual drinking with Zainab. Wishing to play with him, 'Aîsha arranged with the others to say to him, as she did :

"Have you been eating *maghâfir* (the strong-smelling gum of the 'orfot) ?"

"No," he replied, suspecting nothing.

"How is it that you exhale such a strong odour ?" persisted 'Aîsha.

"I only drank honey with Zainab."

"The bees that made the honey must have pilfered from the 'orfot."

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“ I shall not begin again. . . .”

All his wives said the same thing to him and with such success that the next time ‘Aisha offered him honey, he did not dare to eat it. Sawda wondered if the joke had not been carried a little too far.

“ We have actually deprived him of honey ”, she said.

“ Be quiet. . . .” ordered ‘Aīsha.

Things went from bad to worse. Another time Mahomet spent with Maria a night which belonged to Hafsa, who discovered him in the arms of the Copt and reproached him so sternly that he promised to forego Maria for ever on condition that Hafsa did not brawl it about. But Hafsa was not able to keep the secret long. Her friend ‘Aisha and her mother soon knew all about it.

That same day ‘Omar and his wife had a discussion. Besides having an authoritative and rather passionate temperament, his ideas on the female were those of the ancient Qoraishites. His wife had given him some advice and he had quickly put her in her place.

“ What has come over you ? Attend to what concerns you.”

“ You astonish me,” said his wife. “ You do not want me to say a word to you when your daughter does not hesitate to reply to God’s Messenger who has passed many a day a prey to anger because of her. . . . Why even now she is at variance with him.”

“ She shall be well punished,” cried ‘Omar, and, seizing his cloak, he hastened to Hafsa’s apartment.

“ By Allah, yes ! We answer him back,” replied Hafsa to her father.

“ I warn you against God’s punishment and the wrath of his Prophet. Do not allow yourself to be

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friendship nor to be without his wives. He had only sworn to leave them for a month. For twenty-nine nights he slept alone in his turret. Verses of the Koran were revealed to him, reproaching him with too much compliance to his wives' wishes, when God had granted him such freedom in his relations with them ; 'Aïsha and Hafsa were also severely reprimanded for being in league against their husband.

*If he divorce you, his Lord can easily give him in exchange other wives better than you, women resigned unto God, true believers, devout, penitent, obedient, given to fasting, both such as have been known by other men, and virgins.—(lxvi, 5).*

On the twenty-ninth day he came down from his turret and called upon 'Aïsha.

"But had you not sworn to remain for an entire month ?" she had the effrontery to say. "I can only count twenty-nine days."

"This month has only twenty-nine days," he replied.

He had been directed in the revelation to call upon his wives to choose between him and the world. He asked 'Aïsha to consult her parents to find out whether she was to remain with him or to be divorced.

"My father would never advise me to leave you," she said.

All his wives, without hesitation, preferred to remain with him ; Mahomet profited by this general capitulation to call them to order and to put an end to the demand for finery and many other luxuries with which they had theretofore overwhelmed him. But he showed his gratitude by forbidding himself from that time on to marry any new legitimate wives

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(they already numbered nine), a pledge sanctioned by the Koran (xxxiii, 52).

To us modern monogamous Europeans not acknowledging polygamy—unless it be clandestine and outside the family—the position in which Hafsa found her husband seems indeed strange for a Prophet. What shocked Hafsa was not the fact itself, but that the thing should have happened on a day reserved for her, thus breaking the harem rules. It does not appear, moreover, that her contemporaries had thought much of the shocking aspect of it. The scandal of Zainab was based on the violation of the law of adoption ; it was hushed as soon as the law was changed. What his followers mostly admired was the prowess of their chief.

“ We used to say,” said Anas, “ that the Prophet was endowed with the strength of thirty men.” And the young servant related how his master had taken eleven women consecutively in twenty-four hours. Ibn ‘Omar and ‘Aisha bore witness to this.

He imposed periods of chastity upon himself : particularly during the last nine nights of the month of Ramadan which he spent in spiritual solitude in the mosque.

That Islam ameliorated the lot of women in Arabia is hardly to be doubted. “ In the days of paganism,” said ‘Omar, “ our women counted for nothing. But that ceased when God revealed what sort of treatment they should be given.”

“ Amongst the faithful,” said the Prophet, “ the most perfect is he who is remarkable in his mildness towards his wife.” He advised women to be submissive to their husbands, but he forbade the husbands to brutalize them or to marry young girls

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against their wishes or to extort money from them either by divorcing or threatening them.

“Be charitable to the women sprung from your ribs. If you try to straighten a rib you will break it. Accept women as they are with all their curvatures . . . There is more merit in giving to a wife than to the poor or to the holy war . . . When two spouses hold each other by the hands, their sins pass out of their finger-tips . . . Paradise lies at a mother’s feet . . . The kiss that a child gives to its mother is as sweet as the one we imprint upon the threshold of paradise . . . ”

The women of pagan Arabia had no rights of inheritance. “No one may inherit but the user of the lance, the defender of the drinking-trough and the driver of the herds.” Mahomet was called upon to give judgment at the trial of some women whose father had died leaving his inheritance to them but whose male cousins claimed the rights. It was then that the verse giving women the rights of heritage was revealed to him. Their share was the half of that given to men. The Koran forbade the murder of daughters ; it is filled with reasonable advice on their behalf, the same as for orphans. Mahomet prohibited temporary marriages, the prostitution of slaves, and promised “a double reward to him who bought a slave, taught her, freed her and married her”.

The Prophet allowed polygamy ; he could not do otherwise in the land of Abraham. He was far from advising it, however, and only permitted it when strict justice was shown, giving not one pin more to one woman than to another. Four legitimate wives was the maximum allowance, although in his own case his prerogative as Prophet gave him the right to more. He even permitted divorce, but always said that of

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all the unforbidden things, God liked it the least. Monogamy was not the law of nature, moreover ; even the Old Testament in its holy text did not impose it on the patriarchs. If it became the rule amongst the Christians it is because it was propagated in the Western world ; but in reality, the morals of Nero's subjects were no better than those of Abraham's and Jacob's.<sup>1</sup>

Be that as it may, the real question is whether legal and limited polygamy is preferable to the clandestine sort ; the answer will be different in each social group. The Mussulman system is fraught with serious inconveniences, certainly ; and no one in the Orient, from the Prophet to the satiric poets, denied it. But it had the advantage of suppressing prostitution and the celibacy of women, so disastrous to-day. In spite of this, we would prefer Mahomet not to have given us a personal example of polygamy.

At all events it is as false to say that in Islamic society, woman is stripped of her prestige as wife and mother as it would be to reproach Christianity with making of her a cursed creature and a source of sin. A visit to the Orient suffices to show us that family morals are very strict there and that they do not necessarily envy our women in short

<sup>1</sup> Cf. De Castries, *L'Islam*, p. 109.—It is a fact, concluded A. Reville, that “when we take into consideration the times and the country there is no reform more worthy or more fearless than that in which Mahomet showed his initiative in favour of women. . . . The Oriental woman owes much to the Prophet.” The most regrettable thing was the sanction given to the concubinage of slaves.—Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois* (xvi, 2, 8, 11, 12), wisely notes that polygamy and confinement of women were due in the Orient to the climate, to their sensuality, early nubility, and early ageing . . . . These things were really a remedy. “It is the climate which decides these things.”

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skirts and bare arms, our factory-workers and old maids.

There, family love is no more unknown than spiritual love, and Islam is so far from disregarding this that we have borrowed from it many chivalrous and platonic ideals<sup>1</sup> of *l'amour courtois*, of the *gaya sienza* and the *dolce stil nuovo*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> L. Massignon, *Al Hallaj*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the troubadours and romantic poets of the thirteenth century ("gallant love", "gay science", "sweet, new style").

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE TRIUMPH

HODAÏBIYA. KHAÏBAR. THE EMBASSIES. MU'TA.

### THE CAPTURE OF MECCA.

*Have we not raised thy reputation for thee ?  
Verily a difficulty shall be attended with ease.  
When thou shalt have ended thy preaching,  
Labour to serve God. . . . Koran, xciv.  
Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory.  
Koran, xlviij.  
Truth is at hand and error has fled.*

AFTER the failure of the united forces at the Ditch, Medina was out of danger and Islam could look forward more confidently to the future. Mahomet began to anticipate his triumphal return to the city which had expelled him six years before. Since his rupture with the Jews, moreover, he looked upon the Ka'ba, so much venerated by the Arabs, as the spiritual centre of his religion as well as that of the emigrated followers who longed for their native land. The Council of the Ten Elect (all Qoraishites) to whom he had promised certain paradise, concluded that he must put off the pilgrimage no longer.

Fourteen hundred Mussulmans with seventy camels as sacrifices departed for Mecca during the Truce of the Holy Months. They left their arms at Dhu'l Hulaïfa, only keeping their swords ; at

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the same time, the Qoraishites, uncertain whether their intentions were peaceable or not, sent Khalid ben el Walid with some cavalry to stop them.

On a moon-lit night, Mahomet followed a winding course around the mountains, pitched camp at Hodaïbiya within the limits of the sacred territory, and sent word to the Qoraishites that he was on a pilgrimage and not on the war path. He knew that Mecca, weakened by war and commercially embarrassed, only wished for peace.

The Qoraishites sent emissaries to feel the way, the first to present himself being the chief of the Ahabish, who was favourably impressed. But at Mecca he was regarded as an unpolished Bedouin and was asked to resign. 'Orwa, the Thaqifite, having proposed his services, went to the Mussulman camp. The Qoraishites wished to appear indifferent about selecting a stranger, and to be able if need be, to disclaim him ; they hoped to sow dissension, also, amongst the Prophet's adherents by dragging out their negotiations as lengthiy as possible. But Mahomet showed remarkable diplomacy on this occasion. 'Orwa tried to intimidate him :

" You have collected a lot of ragamuffins," said he to Mahomet, " and you mean to use them to carry out your projects, whereas the horsemen of Qoraish are turned out in cuirasses of leopard-skin and they wager that you will not be able to enter by force. Are you trying to exterminate your people ? Your very friends will abandon you."

" Go make love to El Lât ! " cut in Abu Bakr. " Do you believe that we would ever abandon the Messenger of God ? "

The Thaqifite continued to talk ; at each new phrase he gripped the Prophet's beard and each time, El

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Moghîra struck his hand with the scabbard of his sword.

“Take your hands off the beard of God’s Messenger !”

“And who is this individual ?” asked ‘Orwa.

“It is El Moghîra.”

“Ah ! You are the rascal I recently got out of a scrape ! A fine world !” El Moghîra’s conscience, really, was rather heavy, for before his conversion to Islam he had killed and robbed his travelling companions.

“By Allah !” said ‘Orwa before departing, and looking the Prophet full in the face, “Mahomet cannot even spit but what one of his followers gathers it up to smear his face with it, and after he has washed they fight for his bath-water !”

This enthusiast was impressed, however, and told the Qorashites on his return :

“I have been on embassies to princes ; to Cæsar, to Chosroes and the Negus ; but I have never seen a sovereign so well obeyed as Mahomet.”

Two other emissaries received the same impression.

Night came and five hundred Mussulman camp-fires flared up threateningly over Mecca. Mahomet wanted to send someone to arrange for their free access to the temple. ‘Omar, without any very powerful protector there, did not dare to enter the city, but the distinguished Ommayad ‘Othman took over the task. As he did not return after two days, they believed him to be killed and the Prophet, assembling his company under a tree, listened to their solemn promise to fight to the death.

They were about to begin when a spy came to tell them that ‘Othman was safe and sound, bringing a plenipotentiary, Sohaïl ben ‘Amr, an able diplomat

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and master-orator, sent to negotiate with them. Each condition of the agreement was weighed carefully and the Prophet very adroitly managed Sohaïl, who thought he could direct any enterprise.

“In the name of God, merciful and compassionate, and of Mahomet, his Messenger . . .” Mahomet began with a detached air.

“Stop!” cried Sohaïl. “If I thought you were God’s Messenger I never would have raised arms against you. Let us write according to the custom of our fathers : ‘In thy name, O God,’ and you will take the name of your father, ‘Abdallah.”

Mahomet gave in on this question of form in order to prevail ; but ‘Ali refused to write down the humiliating title. The Prophet himself took the pen.

The treaty permitted a ten years’ truce. The Mussulmans must return this time without entering Mecca, but they were permitted to come again the following year as pilgrims and remain there for three days. The Prophet obtained the Protectorship of the Banu Khoza’*a*, the rivals of the Qoraishites ; he gave up his project of assembling the Meccans who wished to become Mussulmans and promised to send back any amongst them who might escape to him. The clay seals were affixed and stamped ; Mahomet kept the original document and the copy was placed in the Meccan archives. In spite of several humiliating conditions it was a triumph for Mahomet to negotiate officially, as one power with another, with the city which had formerly banished him. He saw that the time was ripe but abstained from taking advantage of it too soon. His followers did not quite follow his artfulness in deliberating.

The dissatisfaction of the Mussulmans was further provoked by a painful scene. A man was seen

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laboriously climbing the hill, dragging after him chains which he had just broken. It was Jandal, Sohaïl's son, who had been imprisoned by his father because of his adherence to Islam. Now he had come to seek refuge amongst the Mussulmans.

“ He is the first you will return to us according to the treaty,” said Sohaïl.

Jandal displayed the marks of the brutal treatment he had been submitted to, showing his hands still cut with cords, all the while imploring pity of his fellow-believers.

“ Grant me this as a personal favour,” said Mahomet. But Sohaïl was inflexible and threatened to retract everything. Mahomet gave in.

The dissatisfaction of the Mussulmans increased when the Prophet commanded them to shave their heads in conformity to the latest rites of pilgrimage and to slaughter victims on the spot without going to the Ka‘ba or to Mt. ‘Arafa. He repeated the order three times before it was obeyed.

“ Are you not really God’s Messenger ? ” ‘Omar ventured to ask him.

“ Surely, I am.”

“ Are we not living in truth and our enemies in error ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Why, then, should we allow our religion to be humiliated ? Did you not tell us that God had promised you to allow us our *tawâf* around the holy temple ? ”

“ Yes, but the time was not set. Next year this will take place.”

‘Omar was not satisfied with this explanation and went to seek out Abu Bakr.

“ Is this man not really God’s Messenger ? ”

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“ Surely, yes.”

“ Are we not living in truth and our enemies in error ? ”

“ Yes, without a doubt.”

“ Well ? . . . ”

The army complained. No one carried out the orders of the Prophet who retired to his tent. At last, at the advices of his wife Omm Selma, he came out and himself set an example by sacrificing his camel and shaving his own head. His followers then imitated him ; they shaved each others' heads, almost cutting each other in their haste. And they set out on the road to Medina.

‘Omar, worried at his former audacity, rode in the van, trembling at the thought that the Prophet might be sent a revelation against him. During the night-march he was called to go to the Prophet.

“ It is the revelation against me ! ” said he, very abashed, but obeying.

“ To-night,” said the Prophet to him, “ a sura has been revealed which pleases me more than anything since sunrise.” And he recited :

*Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory.*

Heaven had approved of his actions and congratulated him upon his composure.

“ Will there be a victory, then ? ” asked the hot-headed son of El Khattâb.

“ Yes.”

According to his treaty, Mahomet had to refuse refuge to any of the Meccan converts who, in consequence, took to the “ Jungle ” and formed companies to rob the Qoraishite caravans. These raids were so successful that the Qoraishites themselves agreed to abolish this article in the agreement provided the Prophet would use his influence to stop them.

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Mahomet's conciliatory diplomacy recorded a new success which put an end to the complaints. He diverted the martial ardour of his people against the Khaïbar Jews. Many of those whom he had driven from Medina had found shelter at Khaïbar, an oasis on the road to Syria at a distance of six days' march, and long since prosperous through its rich Jewish population. Khaïbar had become the centre for all the intrigues against Mussulman authority. It was thought that the Israelites threw spells over the Prophet ; one of his illnesses was attributed to a mischievous spell.

The expedition was decided upon. Sixteen hundred men, two hundred of whom were mounted, advanced by a forced march towards the north, conducted by 'Amir who, at night, sang songs of his own composition in rhythm to the camels' monotonous tread. Some of the women of the Banu Ghifar went with the expedition to attend to the wounded.

The horse of one of the Ghifari was close beside that of the Prophet and the man's coarse sandal scraped Mahomet's leg, hurting him so much that he struck the unlucky foot with his whip. The poor Ghifari grew very worried, fearing that a revelation would be sent on his account.

The army reached Khaïbar before dawn. The Jews who had come out with shovels and baskets were terrified and cried :

“ Mahomet ! Almighty God ! It is Mahomet and his soldiers ! ”

“ God is greatest,” said the Prophet. “ Khaïbar is lost.”

The invaders began by seizing the little properties on the outskirts and then attacked the more central

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districts made up of so many fortresses which had to be captured one by one. They set to with rage because they were spurred on by a lack of stores and the knowledge that the Jewish houses were filled with grain and treasure. 'Ali lost his shield but replaced it by a door which, they say, eight men could not raise. The principal and inner fortress at last yielded to the attack.

Amongst the important prisoners were Kinana ben er Rabi', the chief of his tribe, and his wife, the beautiful Safiya, the daughter of one of the Banu Qoraïdha killed the previous year at Medina. Bilal was chosen to conduct this captive and another woman. He led them past the corpses of several Jews. Although her companion wept, scratched her face and tore her hair, Safiya remained impassive. Had she already conceived the idea of seducing her conqueror?

"Take this devil away," said Mahomet, referring to the other woman, while reproaching Bilal with his hard-heartedness. And he covered the beautiful Safiya with his cloak to show that she belonged to him.

The victors spoke of a chamber filled with gold, diamonds and pearls which Kinana alone knew about. The Jewish chief said that everything had been spent.

"If anything is found you will be slain," he was told. And he acquiesced.

A man, either a traitor or weak-minded, said that he had seen his master prowling about a certain spot. Upon searching, a little money was found, but much less than they had hoped for. Mahomet was weak enough (and it is hard to excuse him) to allow Ez Zubair to torture Kinana to force the disclosure of the hiding-place of the remainder. The holy war had ceased to be holy. Ez Zubair took one of two

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pieces of wood used for kindling fire and applied it to Kinana's breast, rubbing it with such force that he fainted, and nothing having been obtained by the torture, Mahomet ordered his decapitation.

The vanquished were allowed to keep their lands which they alone could cultivate, provided that half the products were paid over. Later, Caliph 'Omar drove the Khaïbar Jews into Syria, paying them an indemnity.

In one of the captured houses, a captive, Zainab bint el Harith, was serving them with roasted mutton ; Mahomet took a mouthful of his favourite morsel, the shoulder, but, finding its taste suspicious, immediately spat it out. His table-companion, Bishr ben el Barra', too polite to refuse, ate the poisoned meat and died soon after. And even Mahomet felt sharp pains in his entrails and had cupping applied. When Zainab was questioned she disdainfully denied nothing, and admitted that she had wanted to avenge the death of her father and at the same time test the authenticity of the Prophet's Mission.

"I thought," she said, "that if you were really a Prophet, you would be preserved from danger, and if you were just a chief we should be delivered from a tyrant."

Mahomet spared her (others say that he delivered her over to the vengeance of Bishr's relations) and celebrated his marriage with the beautiful Safiya. At the end of the wedding night, Mahomet came out of his tent and saw Abu Ayub still mounting guard with a flashing sabre.

"I thought of you," said this man from Medina, "and feared this woman who has betrayed her father, her husband, her tribe, and in whose heart infidelity is still quite fresh."

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Safiya, throwing over the faith of her late father, became a convert to the conqueror's religion. The followers continued to regard her with suspicion, however.

The Mussulman army seized the Oasis of Fadak and of Wadil Qora, as well as all the intensive Jewish centres of the region and returned to Medina loaded with spoils and glory.

Mahomet entrusted his commanders with various secondary expeditions, thus forcing the submission of a number of tribes. Then he sent formal messages to foreign princes. Chosroes Eparwiz, receiving a letter inscribed : " Mohammad ben 'Abdallah, Messenger of God, to Kesra, King of the Persians ", flew into a violent rage because a vile slave had dared to place his name before his own, and tore up the paper.

" God will tear up Kesra's kingdom in the same way," said Mahomet when he heard about it.

The embassy to Heraclius met with a better reception. The Greek Emperor was then at Emessa in Syria which he had just re-conquered from the Persians. He read the letter, which said :

" I call you unto Islam, O People of the Book ! Let us end our contentions ; let us worship but one God ; Let us give the name of our Lord to him above. If you reject our faith at least acknowledge us as Mussulmans ('resigned to God')." The Emperor's first impression was that of surprise. He treated the emissary most punctiliously, and sent him back with presents and a very polite but evasive reply. And learning of the arrival of a caravan from Mecca conducted by Abu Sofyan, he invited the latter to come and clear up the matter. Questioned about the new Prophet, the Qoraishite bore witness to the character of his compatriot and adversary.

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“Did you make war against him?” asked the Emperor.

“Yes.”

“Who was the victor?”

“Once he was—once we were.”

“Does he keep his word?”

“We are actually at peace with him, but we do not know how he will observe it.”

“What does he believe?”

“He asks us to give up the faith of our fathers, to worship one God, to give tithes for charity, to keep our word and to abstain from fornication.”

Abu Sofyan was impressed by the attention Heraclius gave to this master of Medina.

“It must be,” said he after this interview, “that Ibn Abu Kabsha (‘the son of the sheep’s father,’ a bizarre nickname given derisively to Mahomet) is just becoming a worthy since the Prince of the Rum is concerned with him.”

At that moment, however, the Emperor had other things to do than to concern himself with any enthusiastic Bedouin or the raids of the Arabs.

Mahomet also sent an emissary to the Moqawqis of Egypt, a vassal of the Emperor, who had become partly independent owing to the Greco-Persian rivalries. The Egyptian replied that he would consider the matter and sent magnificent presents : silks and honey, the ass Ya‘fur, the white mule Doldol, the horse Lazlos, together with slaves, amongst whom was the lovely Maria and her sister, Shirin.

The emissary sent to the governor of Bosra in the confines of Syria, was killed at Mu‘ta by an Arab of the tribe of the Ghassanides, Christian vassals of Heraclius. To avenge his death Mahomet sent Zaid ben Haritha with three thousand men under

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orders to sweep Mu'ta with a dreadful invasion, but to spare women, children, the blind and the monks and avoid the destruction of houses and trees. But the Mussulmans ran up against a strong army of Ghassanides and some Greeks. As they did not know how to form squares they were routed by the enemy's cavalry. Zaid was mortally wounded and gave the standard over to Ja'far as it fell from his hand. (Ja'far, 'Ali's brother, only just returned from Abyssinia, was celebrated for his manly beauty.) He heroically defended the emblem, having his two hands cut off before falling, with head split open and body pierced with more than ninety wounds from lances or arrows. The poet, 'Abdallah ben Rawâha, was killed also. And in the end, Khalid ben el Walid, the new convert, took over the banner, rallied his troops and had nine sabres snapped off in his hand.

Night separated the combatants. The following day, Khalid, well-versed in tactics, pushed forward his troops at a number of points so that the enemy believed he had received reinforcements, and retreated.

The army returned to Medina, piously carrying the body of Ja'far. The Prophet wept for the death of his three generals. He went to call upon Ja'far's widow, and taking the martyr's little son upon his knee, he caressed the child's head in such a fashion that the mother at once understood what had occurred.

"His two hands were cut off," he said, "but God has given him two wings of emeralds and with them he flies amongst the angels of Paradise."

And seeing the daughter of his faithful Zaid approach he leaned his head upon her shoulder and wept. They were astonished and he explained :

"I shed the tears of friendship for the loss of a friend."

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After this excursion which widened the Prophet's political horizon until then confined by the struggle against the Qoraishites or Hijazian Jews and the raids against the nomads, Mahomet turned his attention towards Mecca. The Truce gave him the right to go there that same year on pilgrimage which was called the "Visit of Fulfilment". The Qoraishites departed, leaving the town almost deserted while the unarmed Mussulmans performed their devotions. The Prophet, without dismounting from his camel, made the seven rounds of the temple, each time touching the Black Stone with his staff. The faithful made the *tawâf* on foot, accelerating their pace during the first three rounds to show that the "Medina fevers" had not weakened them. When three days had expired, the Qoraishites begged them to leave, and refused Mahomet's invitation to attend the celebrations following upon his wedding with Maimuna.

Khalid ben el Walîd, the great general, and 'Amr ben el 'Asi, the soulful poet and the "child of Love", were converted to Islam, discovering that all benefits would come thenceforth from that quarter. El A'shâ, a Bedouin poet well known for his erotic songs, also manifested his intention of paying homage to the Prophet.

"He will forbid you many of the things you like," said Abu Sofyan, "for example, love and wine. . . . You would do best to wait a little to see what develops following our agreements with him, or whether there is a possible war." So El A'shâ decided to wait until the following year for his soul's salvation, and go there again when his wine-stores were exhausted. He died during the journey but not before he had written a poem proclaiming Mahomet the "King and mediator of the Arabs".

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Now, the Qoraishites began to be extremely apprehensive about their compatriot's power. While the truce preserved them from an attack, the casual quarrels gave Mahomet a pretext for a rupture which he could have used. Abu Sofyan was sent ; he banked upon the influence of his daughter, Omm Habiba, but recently married to the Prophet. The noble Ommayad's pride was put to a severe test on this errand to treat with him whom he previously had scoffed at and combatted. Mahomet was not pleased to receive him officially, observing in this application a certain weakening on the part of the Qoraishites. Abu Sofyan appealed uselessly to Abu Bakr, 'Omar and 'Ali for intervention, and even tried to flatter Fâtimâ by asking that little Hasan might be his patron.

"He is too young," the Prophet's daughter answered coldly.

Omm Habiba saw her father with the Prophet's permission ; on noticing that he was about to seat himself on a mat, she quickly folded it up saying that no idolater might rest on the couch of God's Messenger. Actually, in adapting himself to circumstances and preparing triumph for his dynasty in the future he was forced to negotiate secretly the approaching capitulation of Mecca. As Khalid ben el Walid and 'Amr had done before him, he now recognized in Mahomet a master of government, and was ready to acknowledge his superiority, not to say his technical ability.

Ten thousand Mussulmans left for Mecca by circuitous roads and pitched camp upon the surrounding heights. The prudent El 'Abbas felt that the moment had come to openly adopt his nephew's religion.

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“ You are the last of the Emigrants as I am the last of the Prophets,” said Mahomet, not without irony, to the old usurer.

‘Abbas, wanting to prevent the extermination of his own people, rode out of the camp that night on the Prophet’s white mule in hopes of meeting some woodmen whom he could send to Mecca to advise the Qoraishites to ask for the *aman*.

Abu Sofyan, with Hakim and Bodaïl, had come out to see what these night-fires meant. El ‘Abbas heard them speaking :

“ These are the fires of the Banu Khoz‘a or of the Banu ‘Amir,” said Bodaïl.

“ They would not be so huge.”

“ I never saw such a large company ! ”

At that moment the three Qoraishites were surrounded by a Mussulman patrol.

“ Woe to you ! ” cried ‘Abbas, appearing. “ It is Mahomet with his followers, and the end of Qoraish ! ”

“ What can we do ? ” said Abu Sofyan.

“ If the Prophet lays hands on you, he will cut off your head. Get behind me. I will ask him to pardon you.” Taking the Ommayad behind him on his mule, El ‘Abbas returned to the camp. The soldiers stood to attention before each fire as the Prophet’s mule passed by. But ‘Omar recognized Abu Sofyan.

“ There is God’s enemy ! ” he cried. “ God be praised for having placed him unconditionally in our hands.”

And El Khattâb’s son was already drawing out his sabre when ‘Abbas firmly said that he would take Abu Sofyan under his protection while awaiting the Prophet’s decision. Followed by the ruthless ‘Omar, he spurred on the mule and rode into the chief’s

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tent. Mahomet ordered him to put off the business until the following day.

"Is it not time that you realized, O Abu Sofyan, that there is no god but God?" he said.

"I already know it," said the Ommayad. "Had there been another, he would have helped me."

"... And that I am his Messenger?"

"I know you to be well-born, generous and wise, but my spirit is still unwilling to acknowledge you as the Messenger of God."

"Submit, or they will kill you," warned 'Abbas. The Prophet was silent, however.

Astonished by this unexpected gentleness and also forced through necessity, Abu Sofyan announced that he now professed the Mussulman faith, and no longer doubted that conditions would be favourable for his city. He received the promise of safety for anyone who sought refuge with him. And to impress him still further Mahomet reviewed his troops. Each tribe bore its own particular banner. When a guard of picked men clad in steel cuirasses finally marched past the Prophet, Abu Sofyan said to 'Abbas :

"This army is irresistible. Really, your nephew has become a powerful king."

"Go home to your own people and tell them to yield."

Mahomet encircled the city, ordering his generals not to be the first to attack and to respect those making no resistance. Sa'd ben 'Obada, a man of Medina, who hated the people of Mecca, was deprived of his command because he declared that on such a day no territory was sacred. The Prophet, wearing his helmet, held the rear-guard himself and then, having joined 'Ali, who had planted his standard on Mt.

## THE TRIUMPH

Hajum, he garbed himself as a pilgrim and wound a black turban round his head. In the meanwhile Khalid ben el Walid with his cavalry entered at the opposite wing. A shower of arrows fell upon them killing two men. The enthusiastic soldier attacked them, but Mahomet's orders soon arrived to stop this butchery, and the dawn brought a new day of which humanity might well have been proud. Mounted on Qoswa, his camel, the Prophet rode into his birth-place.

First he went to the Ka'ba ; forming a procession, he encircled it and then, asking for the keys, he entered and effaced the frescoes which he found there : paintings of Abraham and Ishmael holding divining arrows in their hands, angels in female form (for, said he, the angels are sexless). He struck down the statue of the God Hobal of the golden hand and also a wooden dove suspended from the ceiling. And after having prayed in the purified temple, bowing down twice, the Prophet touched each of the three hundred and sixty stones surrounding the Ka'ba with his stick, saying :

“ Truth is come and error is gone.”

And all the idols were broken in pieces.

Then seizing the ring of gold on the door the Prophet rendered thanks to God who had kept his word.

“ How do you expect me to treat you now that you have become slaves through the force of arms ? ” he said finally to his compatriots.

“ Our only hope is your magnanimity, O generous son of a generous father ! ”

“ Well, go, you are freed,” said the Prophet weeping, “ I say to you what my brother Joseph said to his brothers : ‘ I will not reproach you to-day.

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God will pardon you, for he is the Merciful of the Merciful.””<sup>1</sup>

Bilal went to the top of the temple to call the people to prayer while Mahomet drank of the water of Zemzem from a goblet handed to him by El ‘Abbas ; the goblet has been preserved by the descendants. Then he instated himself at Safa to receive the respects of the populace ; each person filed past his seat, striking a bargain with ‘Omar and taking the oath.

“ God has transformed Mecca into holy territory,” the Prophet declared. “ No one may spill blood. God has only granted me this right for a single hour of a single day.”

A Khoza‘i, having thought that he could satisfy his spirit for vengeance, was found guilty of homicide by Mahomet. He proclaimed a general amnesty, excepting six men and four women. Ibn Khathal, become a Mussulman, had killed his servant from Medina for not having prepared his dinner quickly enough and ever after he denounced Mahomet. He lived in Mecca and encouraged his two beautiful slave-girls to sing satires against the Prophet. He was found caught in the veil of the Ka‘ba, and killed. One of his musicians also was put to death but the other one fled. Muqaïas, formerly Mussulman turncoat and guilty of a murder, was put to death as well ; likewise the poet Huwaïrith. The three other outlaws escaped death. ‘Ikrima, Abu Jahl’s son, fled to the sea coast ; his wife, having obtained his pardon, joined him as he was about to embark and persuaded him to return to Mecca, where Mahomet welcomed him. Habbar ben el Aswad hid for a long time, and then offered himself up at Medina to the Prophet, who pardoned him.

<sup>1</sup> Koran, xii, 92.

## THE TRIUMPH

'Abdallah ben Sa'd was the young secretary who did as he liked with the verses of the Koran dictated to him by Mahomet ; he fled from the wrath of the latter upon his return from Mecca and abandoned his religion. The Prophet, perfectly aware of the satire and mockery directed against him, was particularly angry with this man who had ridiculed and even undermined the foundations of his Mission. His mercy was put to a great test when his son-in-law, 'Othman, foster-brother to the exile, brought back the exile, begging for his forgiveness. Mahomet said nothing. 'Othman was insistent. Inwardly Mahomet said to himself (as he afterwards admitted) that the culprit's head should be cut off. His silence saved 'Abdallah.

The other three exiles were pardoned also, the most important being Hind, who had eaten Hamza's liver. When Abu Sofyan's beautiful wife came before the vanquisher with the other important Qoraishite women, Mahomet could only be magnanimous ; for he had received a verse specifying his treatment of Mussulman women who came to him to take the oath. He enumerated to the believers what was expected of them :

*Thou shalt have but one God.*

Hind readily agreed.

*Thou shalt not steal.*

" But how can a woman steal when she lives in her husband's house ? I only stole from my husband, Abu Sofyan, because he was very stingy and did not give me enough for myself and my children. But I was so discreet that he noticed nothing."

" That is not theft," said the Prophet, smiling.

*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

" A noble-woman not commit adultery ! " cried

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Hind boldly. Everyone knew that this pretty woman had had certain escapades. 'Omar, who had not long since received her favours, looked at Mahomet smiling, and the Prophet, who knew about the affair and noticed his friend's expression, gave him a knowing glance, but said nothing for fear that Abu Sofyan might hear of it.

*Thou shalt not murder children.*

"We brought them into the world, but you killed them the day at Badr!" cried the Qoraishite woman at this.

*Thou shalt not present thy spouse with the children of a lover.*

"And that," broke in Hind, "would be so criminal that one cannot even conceive of it."

*Obey the Prophet in all that is just.*

"If we wanted to disobey you, we should not be here."

Then the Prophet had a tub brought filled with water into which he and the women dipped their hands as they took the oath.

The victor's soul was drunk with pardoning. There in his birthplace, realizing his desires, he only dreamed of winning over the hearts of his people through generosity as the Koran had imposed. He was, moreover, too intelligent not to take into account that reprisals would have been absurd. He gave Safwan ben Omayya, his cousin on the maternal side, a black turban to show that he was forgiven, and accorded this self-centred old representative of the pagan aristocracy a postponement of four months for the renunciation of his religious principles.

When Abu Bakr's aged father came to call upon him, Mahomet said to his friend :

## THE TRIUMPH

“ Why have you troubled this reverend old man ? I, myself, should have gone to see him.”

His affection for his country and his admiration for the Qoraishites' abilities manifested themselves to such an extent that the *Ansar* of Medina were uneasy about his policy concerning “ the uniting of hearts ”, which he resolutely established with regard to his old enemies.

He would have liked to marry Malaïka bint Dawûd but 'Aïsha's connivances put an end to that.

On Khadija's tomb he passed moments of ineffable fullness in prayer, alone with the memories of this first confidant of his great project, at last realized.

After having purged Mecca of idolatry—a herald announced a command to all believers to destroy their household gods and forbade the burning and selling of statues—Mahomet sent his representatives to cast down all the idols of the neighbouring tribes. 'Amr ben el 'Aci cast down *Sowa*', the idol of the Banu Lihyan, at Rahath. Five hundred horsemen went to *Dhu'l Khalasa* to demolish the “ *Yemenite Ka'ba* ” ; they left it “ ruined like a camel's carcase ”. At *Qodaïd*, on the coast between Mecca and Medina, 'Ali destroyed the temple of *Manât*—the goddess of Death, perhaps—and brought back with him the famous *Dhu'l Faqâr*, a sabre placed as a votive offering.

In the land of the Banu Tayy, they cast down *El Fals*, a reddish boulder standing out in relief on the black slopes of Mt. Aja and which they adorned on fête days. Having captured the camp of this half-Christian tribe, they took prisoner the daughter of the chief, the celebrated poet Hatim, noted for his liberality. Mahomet freed her, and her brother, 'Adi, became a convert.

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Khalid ben el Walid cut down the wood sacred to El 'Ozza at Nakhla, where mysterious voices had been heard, and then travelled to Dumat el Jandal where he cast down the statue of Wadd, the figure of a man armed with a sword, a bow, a javelin and a banner. With some of the tribesmen of Solaïm he went to the land of the Banu Jadhîma, who had previously robbed his uncle and a group of the Banu Solaïm. Khalid's one wish was to draw swords against them, although the Prophet had told him only to disseminate the faith of Islam.

He questioned them brutally and massacred many of them after strangling others. Then he ravaged the country and even had the prisoners put to death in spite of the opposition of some of his own men.

When the Prophet learned of these cruelties, he raised his eyes to heaven and bore witness to God that he was innocent of the blood spilled by Khalid whom he reproached severely. Then he sent 'Ali to return to the Banu Jadhîma what had been taken from them and to pay an indemnity to the relatives of the victims.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE

#### HONAÏN. TAÏF. TABUK.

*Have I fulfilled my Mission ?*

DURING the 10th year of the Hegira the Prophet left Medina and set out towards Mecca accompanied by ninety thousand pilgrims from all parts of the peninsula. This triumphal journey of the aging man, worn first by ten years of persecution and then by ten years of unceasing warfare, took place at the apex of his career both as an apostle and a leader. He had made a united people of tribes perpetually divided by wars one against the other.

He was accompanied by his nine wives carried in litters. Thousands of camels decorated with garlands and flying pennants marched in the procession on the road to sacrifice. The Prophet passed the night at Dhu'l Hulaifa where he visited each of his wives in turn. In the morning after the Prophet had performed his ablutions, 'Aïsha anointed his hair ; he then garbed himself in the manner known as *ihram*—head, arms and legs bare, without cloak, tunic or trousers, with a piece of cloth about his body. And so, mounted on his camel he recited the solemn *talbiya*:

“ I am thine, O my God, I am thine ! There is no other besides thee ! To thee alone belong all praise, all majesty ! ”

Mahomet might indeed have gone over the events

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of the past year in his mind, casting a glance upon what had been accomplished. Although born to command he asked of his followers only the obedience due to the man who transmitted God's orders. Between the sole master of the community and the community itself the Prophet was only an intermediary.

"This man aspires to rule the Arabs," said the rebellious Bedouin chiefs.

"The prophesying is over and the empire about to begin," said Abu Sofyan. But Abu Sofyan was still filled with bitterness.

The Prophet forbade them to treat him as a king. While he did exact some of the attributes of kingship, at the same time he led a simple, rustic life.

"I am not a king but the son of a Qoraishite woman," he would say when the people made this mistake.

He had acquired power, riches, and glory ; he possessed gold, spirited horses, innumerable camels and vast pasture lands ; he had wives and children ; he had all that formed "the ornament of earthly existence". But he was not made haughty by these things. One sincere conversion to Islam brought him greater joy than the richest booty. But a secret sorrow troubled his soul : the inability of many to understand the real meaning of his message and his helplessness before the hypocrisy of those who had come over to him only because he was the stronger. Perhaps, too, there was a touch of sadness, a touch of remorse for the inevitable impurity that creeps into all politics, all wars and all governments of this earth.

One day while the faithful were dividing the tribute of the tribes of Bahraïn, Mahomet saw 'Abbas loading his cloak with gold by the handful until it

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was too heavy for him to lift. When he asked for help Mahomet refused it, and the old man regretfully withdrew some of the gold. With what contempt Mahomet looked after his uncle as the latter staggered off with his burden !

The Arabs, after having taken part in the struggle between Medina and Mecca chiefly as mere spectators, finally sided with the conqueror. He received the tribal deputations under the huge, red tent set up on important occasions in the courtyard of the mosque ; but many of them paid homage to the master of Medina rather than to the Apostle of Allah. The Christians of Najran came to discuss the Scriptures with him, agreeing to pay tribute to him at the same time that they held to their own belief. Those who submitted paid only the tithe for the poor. For a long time the Banu Tamim remained sceptical, making fun of the "good news", but they became converts after the poetic war of words in which their bards admitted defeat, although they counted amongst them the brilliant young 'Amr ben el Ahtam, so handsome that he was called "the painted one". Ka'b ben Zuhair, who had been banished for his satires, was again received into favour, thanks to a famous poem in which he called Mahomet "the Sword of Allah".

"No, the Light of Allah," corrected Mahomet, as he handed him his green cloak.

In order to appease the rapacity of the conquerors, which had not been satisfied by the taking of Mecca, Mahomet aided by the new converts made war against the Hawazin, who had allied themselves with the Thaqifites of Taif, upon the advice of Doraïd, a hundred-year-old, blind Bedouin, whose emaciated body was carried about in a litter. Attacked in a

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narrow pass, the Moslem army was almost hewn into pieces.

“They will flee like that straight into the sea,” said Abu Sofyan. “Mahomet’s power has reached its end.”

But Mahomet was saved by the powerful voice of El ‘Abbas rallying the troops. The Hawazin camp was taken.

Young Rabi'a ben Rafi', thinking that he would find a pretty woman in a closed litter on a camel's back, drew aside the curtains. He was enraged to find only old Doraïd inside. He smote him, breaking his sword in two, whereupon the old man said proudly :

“Take my sword ; it is better than yours !” The old man's sword hung from the pommel of his saddle. The furious young man seized it and cut off Doraïd's head.

After the battle there was the orgy. The Mussulmans threw themselves upon the female captives both married and unmarried. In an emaciated old Bedouin woman Mahomet recognized the daughter of his wet-nurse, and she showed him a scar left by a bite he had given her while they were playing together as children. He treated her with kindness.

They besieged Taïf for twenty days, but neither assaults, battering-rams nor catapults (used for the first time) had any effect on the city ; so they divided the spoils : six thousand captives, four thousand ounces of silver, twenty-four thousand camels, and innumerable sheep. The heart of the Prophet was filled with bitterness and disgust as he viewed the scenes of unbridled greed that followed, for the souls of these people had nevertheless remained coarse. So great was the rush that Mahomet himself - his cloak in the scuffle.

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Plucking a hair from a camel, he said :

“ O people, of all the booty and of this single hair only one-fifth comes to me, and even of that one-fifth I am but the warehouse.”

He distributed his share amongst the new Meccan converts “ in order to win over their hearts ”. Mo’awia, the son of Abu Sofyan, the future caliph, received a hundred camels. He became one of the Prophet’s secretaries.

A delegation of Hawazin asked the restitution of their goods or, failing that, at least the release of their captive families. As for himself, the Prophet agreed and tried to make the others follow his example. Thus came about the conversion of the Hawazin, who became his allies against the Thaqifites of Taif. Then murmurs arose amongst the *Ansar*, who complained of being cast aside when they had been some of the first of the faithful. Mahomet pacified their anger by a speech and brought tears into their eyes.

“ Were you not divided amongst yourselves,” he said, “ when I brought you peace ? Were you not lost in error when I showed you the right road ? Were you not poor and have I not made you rich ? As for myself, when they treated me as a liar, you believed in me. When I was a fugitive you welcomed me. Do you think I could forget all that ? These others pasture the sheep, but you—it is myself that you pasture. I give them earthly things with which to satisfy their earthly souls. But as for you, if all the world went one way and you the other, I would go with you.”

Finally the idolatrous city of Taif capitulated. Abu Sofyan and El Moghîra struck down the goddess El Lât and took her jewels while the Thaqifite women wailed aloud.

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Then, in spite of his age and infirmities, in spite of the murmurs of the people and the withdrawal of 'Abdallah ben Obayy and the "Hypocrites", the Prophet led an army of thirty thousand men against the Syrian frontiers in the midst of summer.

"If the heat of summer is scorching, the fires of hell will burn even more," he said.

This was an unfortunate idea. The crossing of the desert was very difficult. The narrow ravines of parched rocks were still haunted by the memory of the Thamudites, an accursed race. The men trembled at the sound of the echoes from the cliffs two hundred ells in height. Then a tempest of sand overtook them. Mahomet ordered his men to walk quickly and that night they camped without food or drink, after a livid sunset. The camels turned their backs towards the wind and formed a wall behind which the men sought shelter, crouching on the ground wrapped in their cloaks. One of them walked out of camp but dropped down asphyxiated ; another was swept away over a precipice.

The next day they continued their march, exhausted, with red eyes, bruised feet, thick saliva, a buzzing in their ears and their skins cracked. They slipped on the black stones, tearing their flesh on the rocks shaped like tree trunks or evil demons. Some of them were delirious and their companions poured down their throats and rubbed on their chests the liquid found in the camel's stomachs.

Clouds with flashes of red darting through them seemed held in the sky by columns of sand, fine as smoke. In the evening a black cloud spread out over the camp like a dome from which, at last, fell large drops of water accompanied by lightning. They were saved ! And several days later they

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arrived in a large plain of sand beyond which a blue line was distinguishable, broken here and there by a forest of green palms : the Oasis of Tabuk.

After having converted several tribes and levied tribute on others, the Mussulmans returned to Medina, not daring to measure themselves against the more regular forces of the Byzantines. Perhaps, too, Mahomet, realizing that he was mistaken in his supposition that Heraclius was preparing an expedition against Medina (for indeed he did nothing to prevent the Islamization of the Arabs of the North), concluded a secret treaty with Heraclius. Mahomet, while he was less of an admirer of the Greeks than formerly, did not want to involve himself with them. He realized, as Ibn Obayy had ironically observed, that a war against the Byzantines was not as easy a game as a war against the Bedouins. He was satisfied to provide for the security of the frontiers of the new Hijazian state and to disperse the gathering of the border tribes.

Such had been the most recent events at the time when Mahomet's career culminated in a solemn visit to the city of his fathers, now purged of all idolatry, for at the pilgrimage of the preceding year he had sent 'Ali to announce a most terrible sura promising at the end of four months a war for the extermination of paganism and the expulsion of the unfaithful from the sacred territory. Thenceforth the true faith reigned in all the Hijaz and even further. No army presented itself to interfere with the peaceful procession of the ninety thousand pilgrims.

The Prophet was indeed in joyful mood. He overlooked 'Aisha's insolence and reprimanded Abu Bakr for having slapped his daughter and whipped a slave who had lost a camel loaded with provisions.

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He entered Mecca with a young boy seated both in front and behind him on his camel—the children of relatives who had come out of the city to greet him. At the door of the Ka'ba, Mahomet made his camel kneel. The following days were most portentous, for the Prophet intended to establish the rites of the pilgrimage for all time.

After three ablutions he performed the *tawâf* around the temple, kissing the Black Stone, and then made the traditional journey between the hills of Safa and Merwa with their ancient pagan sanctuaries. In the Mina valley he camped under a tent of woollen stuff at the foot of 'Arafa, six leagues from the city. It was on this mountain of granite, according to legend, that Adam met Eve after their long separation, and it was first Safa and then Merwa that the unfortunate Hagar had climbed hoping to find someone to save the young Ishmael before the angel had made the spring of water gush forth preserving Ishmael's life. Contrary to the purist notions held by some of the people of Medina, Mahomet found a way of sanctioning all of the old pagan rites so dear to the Qorashites by spiritualizing them and linking them with the Bible traditions.

The following day at dawn after his prayers, the Prophet climbed to the summit of 'Arafa and preached from his camel to the assembled multitude covering the mountain-side and the arid valley, dotted with mimosas, with a sheet of white. Rabi'a ben Omayya, at the Prophet's side, repeated each sentence in his powerful voice. To the East, in the distance, a blue line marked the high peaks of the mountain-chain of Taif.

On this most important occasion the Messenger of Allah wanted to engrave on the minds of his people

## THE FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE

the principles of Islam. He exhorted them not to fall again into the ways of error after he had left them, and to live as a united people.

“ I do not know,” he said, “ whether I shall ever see you again as to-day . . . but I have made it possible for you to continue in the straight path.”

A wave of emotion swept the crowd. He ended by asking twice :

“ Have I fulfilled my Mission ? Have I fulfilled my Mission ? ”

“ Yes ! ” cried the crowd. “ Yes ! ”

“ O God, be a witness to this ! ”

Amidst the general acclamation he began to descend the mountain side and on the way a revelation came to him with such violence that it threw his camel down to the ground. El Qoswa folded her knees and bent her head to the earth while the Prophet recited the last of the verses he was destined to receive.

*This day I have perfected your religion for you . . . and I have chosen for you Islam, to be your religion.—(Koran, v, 5.)*

The enthusiasm of the crowd was doubled, although Abu Bakr fell into a state of great melancholy, for he felt that these words announced the Prophet's approaching death. Mahomet then pressed forward not without some difficulty, calling the people to order. So that he could advance more readily he pulled at the reins so that his camel's head touched her flank. The last rays of the setting sun illuminated his head and shoulders, which dominated the crowd at his feet. Then the darkness fell and with it came the sadness which so often follows moments of great exaltation.

“ Have I fulfilled my mission ? ” Mahomet had asked. In truth, his had been a strange life since the

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visit of the angel in the grotto of Mt. Hira had taken from him for ever all quiet and peace. Those twenty odd years had sufficed to virtually transform the world. A seed had flowered in the desert sands of the Hijaz which was soon to regenerate Arabia and spread its tendrils as far as the Indies and the Ocean.

We shall never know whether Mahomet, when he descended from the red peak of 'Arafa, foresaw the future of his people and the expansion of his religion. Was it possible that he visualized a united Arabia rushing towards the conquest of the fabulous Persian empire, of Syria and of Spain?

Now that these people had a supreme chief (no *sayyid*, not even the father of Imrou'lqais could have fulfilled this rôle), a common bond and a defined programme, the Arabs could embark on the great adventure and play a part in world politics. Lords in tatters, rude beyond a doubt, but at the same time not entirely lacking in a kind of refinement, they were ready to accept the legacies of the dying empires. They were not barbarous invaders like the ancient Germans and Vandals, but they were ready to play their part in history and capable of entering on an equal footing the arena of civilization. They arrived at the right moment to prevent a complete collapse. They took the flame from the weakening grasp of the Byzantines and the Persians and before the thirteenth century they presented to the world the most flourishing of its periods between the building of the Parthenon and of Chartres—the Ommayad and Abbaside caliphates. Alone, they would have been, perhaps, only capable of destruction ; but they brought new vitality to the flickering light of civilization and replenished the flame.

They succeeded because they deserved to succeed ; Islam triumphed because it brought a message that

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was needed by the Oriental world. Before the Hegira, the Mussulmans had endured persecution without defence ; later they put up a legitimate resistance and when they became victors they practised tolerance to a considerable degree. The idolater was not allowed to remain on Moslem soil ; but the *People of the Book*, both Jew and Christian, by paying tribute, had a right to protection, could practise their faith freely, and were considered a part of the community.

“ He who wrongs a Jew or a Christian,” said Mahomet, “ will have me as his accuser.”

The Koran and the *hadiths* are replete with counsels of tolerance. The first Mussulman conquerors followed this advice on the whole faithfully. We do not see entire populations put to the sword and the mass conversions were sincere, generally speaking. When ‘Omar entered Jerusalem, he ordered the Christians not to be molested, neither them nor their churches, and he showered favours upon the patriarch. When the patriarch invited him to pray in the cathedral he refused only because he feared that this might be used later as a pretext for seizing the church.

What a contrast, we cannot help saying, with the entry of the crusaders, advancing in a river of blood up to the knees of the knights and the bridles of the horses, deciding to cut the throats of all Mussulmen who had escaped the first slaughter ! <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ Mahomet’s partisans are the only enthusiasts who have ever united a spirit of tolerance with the zeal of proselytism,” says Robertson (English historian). “ It is indeed sad for the Christian nations, that religious tolerance, which is the great law of charity for one people towards another, was taught them by the Mussulmans,” says the abbé Michon (*Voyage religieux en Orient*). These judgments are a little exaggerated, for Christianity orders and often practises tolerance and Islam does not always furnish an example to be followed in this respect.—“ The Bible, the Evangel and the Koran are three

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Later, unfortunately, came the Mongolian invasions which destroyed the irrigation system of Irak and set up red pyramids of decapitated heads, the militarist Turks whose very intolerance provoked the crusades, the civil wars begun by the Prophet's own followers, the cupidity, the despotism, the misunderstandings, the fanaticism—all evil influences.

“Our zeal,” said Montaigne, “performs wonders when it is sustained by our hatred, our cruelty, our ambition, our avarice, our destructiveness, our rebellion; but such is not the case when deeds of kindness, of benevolence, of temperance, are to be furthered . . . Our religion was intended to pluck out vice; instead it breeds, nourishes and incites vice!”

Evolution is often only a procession of misunderstandings and intolerance. In practice the early principles became distorted. The social and political decline of the Moslem world went hand in hand with the forgetfulness of these first principles. But to-day the Mussulman peoples seem to be awakening. They are destined, perhaps, to play an important part as the connecting link between the West and the extreme East. They are perhaps the reserve strength of the old world.<sup>1</sup> But aside from social and political

books that accord; religious people study all three and revere them equally. Thus the divine teachings are completed and true religion shines throughout the centuries,” recently said Sheikh ‘Abdu. Unfortunately, few follow this example, and most Mussulmans, even well-educated Mussulmans, have a repugnance for the Bible in spite of the fact that the Koran (x, 94), prescribes the study of the Bible.

<sup>1</sup> “I will make him a great nation,” is written in Genesis of Ishmael (xvii, 20; 13; xxi, 18). “Perhaps,” says the abbé de Broglie (*Problèmes de l'histoire des religions*, 1886), “the progress of Islam is the fulfilment of the promise made to the father of the True Believers.”

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considerations, ought we not to try to understand to-day, more than ever before, the essentials of a reality that will not readily vanish from the face of the earth ?

The next day at Mina, the Prophet threw seven stones against each of the three piles of masonry which represented the devil. Then he freed some slaves and sacrificed camels in great numbers. The multitude followed his example and the cries and death-rattles of the victims echoed in the valley flowing with blood. The animal about to be sacrificed stood on three legs (having been tethered by the fourth). A man approached with a hidden sword, which he thrust into the base of its neck. Mahomet then had the hair shaved off with a large, sharp arrow-head and it was cast upon the branches of thorny bushes so that it would be scattered on the people by the wind. Pilgrimage was over.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE DEATH (632)

*Mahomet is dead but God (may he be exalted!) lives for ever.*

“I, TOO, have revelations from heaven,” said El Aswad who lived in Yemen at that time.

The Arabs were open-minded in matters of religion. In the course of a month all of the south-west of Arabia abjured Islam to follow this magician, El Aswad. He invaded Christian Najran and then entered Sana'a. At night by the light of torches and to the sound of barbaric music a multitude of beasts were slaughtered, while the public square flowed red with blood. Then El Aswad would put his ear to the ground to listen to the voice of his inspiring *jinn*. All the Mussulman officials fled in haste to Medina.

Still another prophet, Musaīlima, stepped forward at Yamama on the shores of the Persian Gulf, conquering the south-east of the peninsula. He claimed that he received suras from the Angel Gabriel and he recited a curious hodge-podge of the Koran in which he described the Elephant with the large trunk and the little tail, and assigned to the soul a most humble habitation. There arose also a prophetess amongst the Banu Tamim ; Musaīlima disposed of his rival by becoming her lover.

Was this the end ? Would the Bedouins abandon Islam and follow the imposters ?

## THE DEATH

Musaīlima was audacious enough to write to the Prophet :

“ We are both Messengers of Allah ; let us divide the world between us.”

Mahomet replied that the world belonged to God. But he was too ill at that time to suppress the usurpation. El Aswad, however, was assassinated and his wife aided in the crime : attacked in his bed, he began to bellow like a bull ; but his wife said to the guards “ Do not pay any attention to him for he is receiving a revelation.”

Just as his army was about to set out for Syria under the command of the young favourite Osama, the son of Zaid (whose leadership was imposed upon the army with difficulty), Mahomet was seized with a violent attack of the illness with which he had suffered for some time, due, probably to the drinking of impure water and to the poison of Khaībar. He became delirious ; imagined that his enemies were trying to kill him by magic practices, and was subject to strange sexual hallucinations. During a nightmare, he went to the cemetery with a servant and congratulated the dead upon having found peace.

The illness became even worse while he was with his wife Maīmuna, the sister-in-law of El ‘Abbas. He remained there seven days. Had he continued to stay there, the history of the world might have been different. A silent and sly, but bitter struggle took place at the dying man’s side. ‘Abbas, who had often been at the deathbed scenes of the Banu ‘Abdelmottalib, knew by his nephew’s face that he was dying. He would have liked to keep him at Maīmuna’s in the interests of the Hashimites but the other clan was watching. Abu Bakr and ‘Omar had in their two daughters, ‘Aīsha and Hafsa, useful

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allies. As 'Aïsha was the favourite amongst the wives, there was little difficulty in persuading the Prophet to go to her. They obtained the consent of the other wives each of whom gave up her "day" to 'Aïsha, and so Mahomet, rolled in a blanket, was transferred to 'Aïsha's apartment.

Abu Bakr and his daughter kept a close guard. Thereafter when the Prophet asked to see a member of his family, 'Ali or 'Abbas, 'Aïsha went in search of her father or her brother, 'Abderrahman, the new convert. She helped him to pass his own hands over his body so as to exorcize the evil spirits himself and to feel the effects of his own *baraka*. She sent little drops of saliva over him while reciting talismanic portions of the Koran. She poured the contents of several water-bottles over his skin to calm his fever. A number of times he fainted, his head in her lap.

"The poison of Khaïbar is devouring my entrails and tearing at my veins!" he cried, weak and excited through suffering. And he rolled on his couch and groaned :

"There is no strength and refuge but in God. Ah! death had its pangs!"

'Aïsha chided him for complaining so much.

"If we behaved like that," she said, "you would scold us."

The prophet complained like a child when they tried to give him medicines. One day when he was enjoying a momentary respite, he went from his room into the courtyard of the mosque where the faithful were gathered together for prayer and, after having led in prayer (for the last time), he said :

"If there is anyone amongst you whom I have caused to be flogged unjustly, here is my back!"

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Strike in your turn. If I have damaged the reputation of any amongst you, may he do likewise unto mine ! To any whom I may have injured, here is my purse ! Speak without fear. It is better to blush in this world than in the world beyond."

Then a man arose and claimed a debt of three dinars, which was immediately paid him.

After having said prayers for the dead of Ohod, the Prophet declared :

" God has given unto one of his servants the choice between this world and the one nearer to him, and that servant has chosen the one closer to God."

Upon his return to his house, he freed his slaves, and seeing that he still had some money, he distributed it amongst the poor, not deeming it fitting to present himself with money before his Maker.

On Thursday, the 8th Rabi' el Awwal, his illness increased in violence and the following four days were nothing but a long death-rattle, with intervals of lucidity and fainting-fits. Osama gave up the expedition into Syria and came to see the person whom his father had so loved. Mahomet was able barely to make a gesture with his hand ; after this mute interview, Mahomet emerged from his state of apathy and cried out with great excitement :

" Bring me writing materials so that I can write down what is to be preserved from error after me."

" Pain is deluding God's Messenger," said 'Omar.  
" We have God's Book which is enough."

Then a noisy discussion broke out in the room. They were divided in their opinions.

" Go out ! Go out !" called the sick man. " How comes it that you dispute in my presence ? "

In the mysterious dimness of death, what was it

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that the Prophet wanted so much to record ? Was he prompted by the delirium of a dying man, or was it a moment of supreme lucidity ? And what were the interests that refused to grant his wish ?

“ It is bad, oh, very bad, to oppose the Prophet,” said El ‘Abbas’s son as he left the chamber.

Bilal announced prayer. At first Mahomet thought he could not preside and seemed disinterested. ‘Aisha and Hafsa suggested his delegating either of their fathers. He sent Abu Bakr. And then the Prophet was seized with disquietude ; he succeeded in performing his ablutions without losing consciousness and then, supported by ‘Ibn ‘Abbas and ‘Ali, he went out. (Without a doubt these two Hashimites had arrived in the hope of counterbalancing the dreaded influence of ‘Aisha and Hafsa.) When they saw him enter the mosque, the people applauded. Abu Bakr turned round and indicated his wish to leave, but Mahomet made a sign to him to remain and pray beside him.

The following Monday the faithful saw their leader for the last time. Lifting up the curtain, Mahomet appeared in the doorway of his room opening into the courtyard of the mosque. His face was like parchment, but he made an effort to smile. The people rose in disorder but he signed to them to continue their prayers. They believed that he was improving in health.

Azrail, the angel of Death entered the room. The death agony had begun. Mahomet lay with his head on ‘Aisha’s lap, she continually moistening his face with the water in a bowl near the bed. Finally, he sat up, raised his hand, and said :

“ Allah ! . . . Yes. With the companion on high . . . ”

## THE DEATH

His hand dropped, his head rested against 'Aīsha's shoulder. His soul had flown to the unalterable dwelling-place.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mahomet's death was a signal for general confusion. He had not determined the question of his succession. Several parties presented themselves: the *Ansar* of Medina on the one hand and the Meccan *Mohajirūn* on the other. These were divided into (1) Abu Bakr and 'Omar, the "right hands" of the Prophet and fathers-in-law as well, plebians, self-made men; (2) the Hashimites, 'Ali, Fātima, 'Abbas, the Prophet's immediate relatives; (3) the Ommayad patricians, 'Othman, the Prophet's son-in-law, Abu Sofyan, his father-in-law, and Mo'awia.

The *Ansar*, seeing in the occasion an opportunity of throwing off the yoke of their troublesome guests, united at the market-place of the Banu Sa'ida, under the presidency of Sa'd ben 'Obāda. Frightened, the *Mohajirūn* locked themselves in. Abu Sofyan was absent. 'Othman remained at home. 'Ali's friends sought shelter near Fātima; the Hashimites had barricaded themselves in the death-chamber. Notified by his daughter, Abu Bakr came on horseback. Weeping, he kissed the face of the dead man. At the doorway he met 'Omar, who was brandishing his sabre and threatening to kill anyone who said that the Prophet was dead. The crowd also refused to accept the fact.

"If you adore Mahomet," said Abu Bakr, "know, then, that he is dead. If you adore God, know that God lives and cannot die."

It was this attitude that saved Islam. 'Omar bowed before it. Besides, there was pressing business. Abandoning the body which had already begun to swell, the two disciples went to the meeting of the *Ansar*. Abu Bakr's coolness, in which he was almost alone, the division of the people of Medina, the absence of the Ommayad, the irresolution of 'Ali who was depending upon his own rights in the matter, made it possible for Abu Bakr to obtain the caliphate, almost by surprise, as it were, after a very adroit speech.

"The death of the Messenger of Allah is not troubling you greatly," said 'Ali to him.

The body lay neglected. Finally, the Hashimites washed and interred it, wrapped in three pieces of stuff and thirty-six hours after his death; custom demanded that a body be buried the day of its passing. Abu Bakr and 'Omar did not go to the funeral. 'Omar struck down Abu Horaira with a blow of his fist, forced his way into

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Fâtimâ's house and almost came to blows with 'Ali. Exasperated by these things, the daughter of the Prophet threatened to uncover her tresses in public as a sign of distress and of shame.

"Prophets do not have heirs," said Abu Bakr when 'Ali and Fâtimâ came to claim their inheritance.

The poor woman died a few months later, spitting blood constantly. She declared herself happy to leave a world filled with iniquity where her rights were trampled under foot. 'Ali remarried many times, and was later elected caliph, after 'Omar and 'Othman.

From then on there were bitter struggles amongst the followers, Sunnites against Shi'ites, Ommayads against 'Alids, opportunists against purists. The cunning 'Abbasides, the heirs of the uncle of the Prophet, finally put an end to the struggle to their own profit. The weary *Ansâr* continued their rôle of sacrifice by devoting themselves to exegetical and theological studies.

Such was the struggle and anguish of the great saints of Islam ; a painful scandal to the believers who refused to judge them, seeing in them, perhaps, the results, on an all too human plane, of the inscrutable Wisdom of Providence. Thus 'Ali and 'Abbas were eliminated as candidates for the succession the day following Mahomet's death ; and possibly the latter were too practised, the first not practised enough. Likewise was eliminated Sa'd ben 'Obâda, the *Ansâri*, whose succession would have meant that Islam became a small local sect vegetating in the palm-groves of Medina. This was to the advantage of Abu Bakr, the firm ; he suppressed the Bedouin rebellion ; he paved the triumphal way for 'Omar the Conqueror.

THE END.

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